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BLACK AND BLUE

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LIVES
MATTER

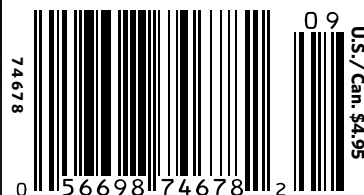


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~~DISCRIMINATE~~
~~REJECT~~
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Embrace

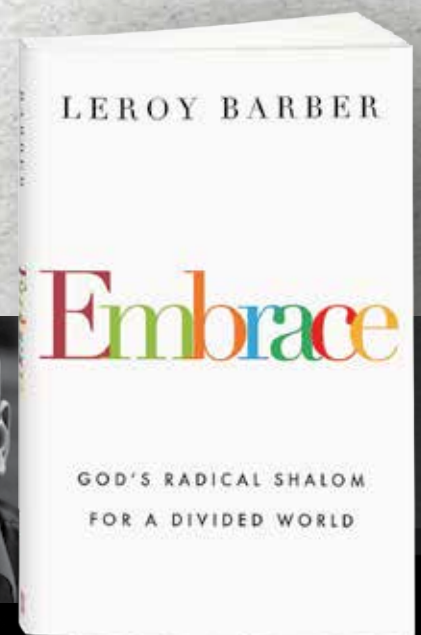
Embrace those who are different.

Embrace a hurting world.

Embrace the challenge to radically love.

"**Leroy Barber** makes the case for why deeper and more loving relationships, especially with people who are unlike us, hold the key to . . . repairing the breaches in our lives and societies."

— **JIM WALLIS**, president, Sojourners



AS WE WERE wrapping up this issue, we watched Cameron Sterling weep uncontrollably on national television for his daddy, Alton Sterling, who had been killed by police officers in Baton Rouge. The next day, in a suburb of St. Paul, Minn., Lavish Reynolds livestreamed the aftermath of a police officer shooting her boyfriend, Philando Castile, while her 4-year-old daughter sat in the seat behind her.

Then the news from Dallas: five officers dead, killed by a sniper who targeted the police at a peaceful protest.

Words fail. Into that silence we step, however ungainly our motion, with lament-filled solidarity toward the slain and the weeping. We move with the power of the psalms.

We know violence begets violence. We know there are too many guns. We know

America still needs to repent of racism and white supremacy, our original sins. We know our model of policing in this country serves only some of our citizens. And we know this must change.

In our cover story, we offer examples of police officials—from Richmond, Calif., to New Haven, Conn.—who are working on new models of policing that teach officers to see the people in their communities not as threats to be neutralized but as precious lives they have been entrusted to protect. Unlike “broken windows” policing, which focuses on minor offenses such as loitering or loud music, the philosophy of community policing is to establish trust with a community by walking a beat, building relationships,



and handing out officers' cell numbers. “We try to instill in the mindset of our officers that it is a failure of the system—of which we are a part—when we have to make an arrest,” said one police official.

Ending oppressive policing in this country is possible, but only if the stories told in this issue mark the beginning of wider systemic change. However, the real power for change comes from God at work in the human heart and in structures and institutions, small and large. At every moment, we must be people who choose life—on the streets, on the force, in our families and churches, in our social policy. Out of this will rise a “more perfect union.” ■

Letters

Zoos Aren't Circuses

While I was especially pleased to see an issue devoted to Christian philosophy and historical evangelism against animal cruelty, I feel compelled to take issue with a very small part of “All God's Creatures” (by Karen Swallow Prior, July 2016). Prior, like many others, conflates zoos and circuses as one in treatment of their animals. The Association of Zoos and Aquariums has strict guidelines to protect their charges, and most large zoos are in fact run by extremely successful conservation organizations. At the Bronx Zoo, operated by the Wildlife Conservation Society, we consider our animals as ambassadors for their wild brethren whose habitat and existence are threatened. Its function is to educate, genetically preserve, and protect (through field research) God's creation. Its exhibits are designed to keep its occupants healthy and happy.

Candace Breen
Bronx, New York

What about Plants?

In response to July's cover articles (“All God's Creatures” and “Beyond Meat” by Charles Camosy), I would say that as long as bioethicists ignore unrestrained growth of the human population, concern for other

Christians must attend to the energy needs of all species.

animals' well-being is academic nonsense, especially when ignoring plants and other species. Unless humans develop the ability to photosynthesize, our energy needs for survival are going to lead to the destruction of most other species. The book of Genesis was written for a world human population of less than 100 million, not for 7 billion and climbing! We Christians must attend to the energy needs of all species.

Herb Edwards
Macomb, Illinois

Non-Holy Roller

Thanks for the piece in the June 2016 issue titled “Holy Rollers,” by Steve Holt. I appreciated the profile of Rev. Laura Everett and the focus on transport as a means of living our faith. That being said, I'm concerned that Holt may be over-spiritualizing what is fundamentally a pragmatic choice for me and many others. I don't bike because it is good for the planet or my neighborhood, or because it reminds me of death. I bike because it's cheap, quick, and fun. To say otherwise gives me unnecessary credit. I'm not sacrificing for God or my neighborhood

when I bike; in fact, I can't imagine doing anything else.

Greg Williams
Washington, D.C.

'Enough' Means Enough

I found Rev. Rob Schenck's article “Should Christians Own Guns?” (May 2016) upsetting, particularly his misinterpretation of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. When Jesus responds “Enough!” to the disciple who says they have two swords, he is most certainly not implying that two swords would be “enough to do the job,” but that his followers have said enough in their temptations to use force. It is impossible to come to Schenck's conclusion, since a short time earlier Jesus says to a follower who has drawn a sword, “Put up your sword. All who take up the sword die by the sword” (Matthew 26:52). Jesus never condoned violence against another human being.

Carol Nesbit
Port Washington, New York

“But wait!” Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, Sojourners, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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THE LANSING LEE CONFERENCE

Are civility and respect as spiritual values essential to democracy? Led by New York Times writer Mark Oppenheimer.

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BY JIM WALLIS

On the Road Again



WHEN WE chose the name “Sojourners,” we didn’t realize how often we would end up earning that brand. We’re on the move again. Sojourners is moving our office to the Stanton Park neighborhood of Washington, D.C., a five-minute walk from the U.S. Capitol.

A move like this always makes me reflect deeply about our vocation in reference to our location.

When Sojourners moved to D.C. from Chicago in 1975, we deliberately moved to one of the poorest parts of the city and consciously compared our new location to the “catacombs,” which were the poorest sections in Rome. We would move to the outside of power, “the other Washington,” and from there seek to relate to the insiders of political power in official Washington.

Right away, we got very involved in those poor neighborhoods with our new neighbors, whose needs and voices directly

by millions of people in the media and those in Washington, both in Congress and the White House. This has now become an important expression of our mission.

The Christian community called Sojourners has been led on a long pilgrimage (45 years so far) learning how difficult and transforming it really is to love one another, to love our neighbors close to home and around the world who have been oppressed, and to honestly and courageously speak truth to power. Now we take our *voice*, and the voices of those that are seldom heard in Washington, D.C., with our *presence* to the shadow of the Capitol building. Learning what a prophetic presence and voice could now mean in our new location is our new task—turning our face to Jerusalem. How do we best lift and leverage the voices of those on the margins to confront and change political power?

Washington’s catacombs are being gentrified, and our old neighborhood of Columbia Heights has seen nightly gunfire replaced with Best Buy and Bed, Bath, & Beyond. So too has the shape and place of our own ministry changed. What began as a small intentional community has become a much larger network and movement of believers who are called “to articulate the biblical call to social justice, to inspire hope and build a movement to transform individuals, communities, the church, and the world.”

ONE OF THE things we have learned along the way is the difference between kinds of power. What we mostly see in official Washington is power derived from status, wealth, job title, and connections—power derived from human beings. But there is a better kind of power, embodied by the Greek word *dunamis*, which appears 120 times in the

New Testament. It can be loosely translated as “power,” or “strength,” or “ability.” English words such as dynamite, dynamo, and dynamic all derive from *dunamis*. It is a word with rich layers of meaning.

It’s important to note that *dunamis* is not just any power; rather, it often refers to miraculous power, or marvelous works, or moral and spiritual power. Perhaps most important, *dunamis* refers to the inherent power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature. Specifically, the power of God is God’s innate *dunamis*, which is part of God’s own nature. As people of faith, we believe that it is not through our own power but God’s that we are able to do what really changes things. God confers on us God’s *dunamis* through the Holy Spirit, and it is only through that God-given power—which is God’s own power—that we can accomplish good things in this world.

At their best, the most powerful movements for change have tapped into this kind of power—human beings animated by moral and spiritual power that changes lives and history. Our new location will be a place that aspires to that kind of spiritual power, to evoke and sustain it in the shadows of the traditional power and wealth of this city, to draw lawmakers and their staffs who seek a different and better moral logic, to train activists who believe that faith can indeed change things, and to be a place that brings moral voices to be heard by the political voices.

Please pray that such power—*dunamis*—will motivate and continually transform Sojourners and the issues we are called to take on. And please, come visit us when you come to Washington! ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

Our new location will aspire to evoke spiritual power in the shadows of traditional power and wealth.

shaped our work. We also traveled all over the country and around the world to places where people were asking for help in putting their faith into action, especially in the many places where marginal people had been left out, forgotten, and oppressed. Both locally and globally, it was the poor and vulnerable and those working alongside them whose “voices in the wilderness” filled the pages of *Sojourners* magazine and eventually our digital spaces.

During those years, our voice became increasingly heard in the public square, regularly listened to

Franklin Golden



Grooming Freedom Fighters

"We Have the Power" is a weeklong camp that teaches children to put their faith into action through community organizing. Duke Memorial United Methodist Church in Durham, N.C., hosted and organized the camp, in partnership with seven other congregations. "Dr. King didn't just fall out of the sky. Rosa Parks didn't just fall out of the sky. Somebody groomed them," said Rev. Heber Brown, whose Baltimore congregation hosts a similar camp. "We're trying to groom the next generation of Freedom Fighters."

By Beau Underwood

Living on Almost Nothing in America

Welfare reform, 20 years later, has increased poverty—and moral poverty as well.

TWENTY YEARS AGO, President Bill Clinton promised to "end welfare as we know it" by signing into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, otherwise known as "welfare reform."

Controversial at the time, the law placed a five-year time limit on government financial assistance to those in need and instituted work requirements for welfare recipients. With two decades of hindsight, there is now sufficient evidence to evaluate its effectiveness, the holes it created in our nation's social safety net, and what needs to be done to address them.

One of the best examinations of this law's effects is the insightful book *\$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America*. Scholars Kathryn J. Edin and H. Luke Shaefer note that welfare reform has succeeded in important ways. "Poor single mothers," they write, "left welfare and went to work in numbers that virtually no one expected. In 1993, 58 percent of

low-income single mothers were employed. By 2000, nearly 75 percent were working, an unprecedented increase." While the Great Recession reversed some of this progress, the employment rates remain "above pre-reform levels." Child poverty rates also fell after welfare reform's passage and

economic reality many mistakenly believe only exists in the developing world. The causes of this poverty are legion and well-rehearsed. The forces of globalization; societal inequalities in education, housing, and transportation; a criminal justice system that emphasizes retribution instead of

"Welfare 'reform' is a misnomer, leaving some families with children utterly destitute."

remain down, though the authors note that additional measures, such as the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit and increased government spending on child-care programs, also factor into this decline.

But the outcomes are not universally positive. In the first 15 years after passing welfare reform, the number of people living in "\$2-a-day poverty" had more than doubled.

By 2011, 4 percent of U.S. families—3 million children—were mired in an

rehabilitation; medical issues and the affordability of health care; the demands of caring for a family; poor personal decision-making; becoming the victim of exploitation—all these factors and more shape the lives of impoverished Americans.

While few of these issues are new, what *has* changed is their intensity and the ability of the social safety net (specifically, the availability of cash assistance) to catch those who fall on hard times. The suffering experienced by those living on the economic margins of

Our Mission

The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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a materially prosperous society recently led *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof to abandon his previous support of the 1996 welfare reform legislation. "What I've found in my reporting over the years," he writes, "is that welfare 'reform' is a misnomer and that cash welfare is essentially dead, leaving some families with children utterly destitute."

This is the reality that must be faced. It is a moral crisis requiring a response from Christians, who are scripturally and ethically burdened with caring for children in distress.

My own congregation in central Missouri sponsors a food pantry that feeds nearly 1,000 families on a monthly basis. Each week I encounter those resiliently living the struggles described in *\$2.00 a Day*, and I wrestle with stretching our meager

resources to respond to their pleas for emergency shelter, utilities assistance, or filling an empty fuel tank.

A problem of this magnitude cannot be addressed by churches and nonprofits alone. This is a public policy issue demanding the attention of our elected leaders who must not be allowed to reduce the human realities of financial hardship to a statistical abstraction. Behind the numbers are real people whose stories and struggles should not be ignored. Refusing to recognize their plight and respond to their needs reveals a moral poverty that also needs to be reformed. ■

Beau Underwood, former senior director of advocacy at Sojourners, is a Disciples of Christ minister in Jefferson City, Mo.

By Chris Antal

'I Refuse to Be an Empire Chaplain'

Why a U.S. Army reserve chaplain resigned in protest.

I SERVED FIVE years as a U.S. Army reserve chaplain. This spring I submitted my resignation to the president of the United States. I refuse to support U.S. policies on armed drones, nuclear weapons, and the policy of "preventive war." I told the president, "I refuse to serve as an empire chaplain."

I grew up skeptical of military solutions and decided not to register for the Selective Service System when I turned 18. How, then, did I end up in the Army?

The call to bring my religious values of justice and compassion into the Army chaplaincy came in response to three realities: soldiers burdened by multiple deployments, a military replete with uniformed evangelicals occupying Muslim lands, and the torture at Abu Ghraib.

As chaplain I was pastor: nurturing the living, caring for the wounded, and honoring the dead. However, I also claimed the prophetic biblical imperative to "speak truth to power."

When I witnessed drone warfare in Afghanistan, my anguish peaked. In 2016, I preached a sermon titled "A Veterans Day Confession for America" lamenting drone killing and "preventive war." Military commanders reacted harshly. I was discharged with a reprimand and negative evaluation.

I learned that U.S. military chaplains are not allowed to have a prophetic voice; they are expected to be nothing more than empire chaplains.

Empire chaplains, like empire churches, represent what T. Jeremy Gunn calls the "American National Religion," an unholy trinity of governmental theism, military supremacy, and capitalism as freedom. These chaplains and churches betray authentic religion by their words, their presence, or, most often, their silence. They cloak state violence with the garb of piety, lend religious legitimacy to military campaigns, and conflate God and country.

The authentic Christian church can prevent this spiritual bankruptcy by exercising the right to speak for God prophetically against a nation and its policies. America needs this prophetic witness now.

The U.S. uses just war tradition to endorse and justify violence rather than prevent and limit it. President Obama and CIA Director John Brennan have sought to rationalize drone killing by invoking just war principles, such as humanity, necessity, proportionality, and discrimination. Brennan's predecessor, Gen. Michael V. Hayden, argued in a *New York Times* opinion column in February that drone strikes effectively kill "intolerable"

From the Archives

August-September 1975

The Move to D.C.

AS SOME of you have no doubt already heard, the *Post American* [the original name for *Sojourners*] and our entire community will be moving, in early September, from Chicago to Washington, D.C. ... The *Post American*, first published in late 1971, began as a quarterly tabloid and has developed into a monthly magazine with a broadly ecumenical, national, and international readership. ... The final decision came less through an analytical process of weighing the pros and cons and more as a result of a growing sense among us all that Washington, D.C., was the right place for us to be.

It seemed rather ironic, at first, being a group that holds little confidence in the American political system and has come to question the wisdom of viewing the exercise of political power as the road to meaningful and fundamental change on both biblical and historical grounds. Change comes, we suspect, more through the witness of creative and prophetic minorities who refuse to meet the system on its own terms but rather act out of an alternative social vision upon which they have based their lives. Such a definition of the church seems, to us, more consistent to the New Testament. Slowly, we came to believe that, perhaps, the most appropriate place for such a community was in the midst of an environment characterized by urban conflict and the idolatry of political power rather than a place more withdrawn from such things. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.



terrorist threats, like those in “training camps where men leapt off motorbikes and fired on simulated targets.” For Hayden, drone strikes appear to be a convenient opportunity, not an unavoidable necessity.

Drones pose a unique moral hazard. Drones make killing easy and *appear* risk-free and moral, thereby lowering the threshold for the use of lethal force. Hayden conflates threats he considers “intolerable” with *imminent* threats to Americans, masking vital distinctions. Unlike Hayden, I believe that killing people we suspect might possibly harm us at some point in the unspecified future can never be morally justified.

The U.S. has killed between 4,885 and 8,393 people with drones since 2001. And the U.S. possesses nearly half of the 15,700 nuclear warheads in existence, with hundreds ready to launch on warning. These weapons terrorize humanity and threaten

the Earth, yet the country plans to spend billions modernizing and miniaturizing them. The church should not tolerate this, but rather should demand that the U.S. stop killing people with drones and cancel nuclear modernization plans.

When I joined the Army, I joined the Department of Defense, not a department of pre-emptive, aggressive, endless war. Drone strikes and nuclear intimidation will not bring security. U.S. officials graced with tolerance and humility—and a church courageous enough to resist American National Religion—might. ■

Chris Antal is the minister at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Rock Tavern, N.Y. He served five years as a military chaplain in the New York National Guard and in the U.S. Army Reserve, with one tour on active duty in Afghanistan (2012-13).

By Darlene Nicgorski

Convicted of the Gospel

The “new sanctuary movement” stands with undocumented migrants.

ON MAY 1, 1986, a federal jury found nine church activists guilty of conspiracy to violate U.S. immigration laws for assisting Central American refugees. At our sentencing, I faced a possible 25-year prison sentence.

The “sanctuary trial” drew national attention; millions of Americans learned about the plight of Central American refugees and the church-led sanctuary movement to aid them. After a seven-month trial and our conviction, the judge suspended our sentence and gave us five years of probation.

In the 1980s, our case hinged on the fact that we knew that those arriving over the southern border were refugees from brutal wars in Guatemala and El Salvador. I had worked in Guatemala and in Guatemalan camps in southern Mexico. We placed refugees in communities of faith where people met them as real people and learned why they had fled. We defied U.S. immigration laws in order to protect life. We also challenged the Reagan administration’s support of brutal regimes in Guatemala and El Salvador.

Today, most of the non-Mexican

undocumented immigrants coming over the border are from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Many are unaccompanied minors or single adults with children. Many have legitimate asylum cases, but don’t have adequate legal representation.

The new sanctuary movement is addressing four key areas: First, assisting migrants when they arrive with basic needs and legal help. Diocesan Migrant Refugee Services in El Paso, Texas, is the largest provider of “Know Your Rights” information to refugees, particularly those staying in community-run hospitality houses along the border. Without the assistance of volunteers, usually church-affiliated, migrants would be on their own—or worse, detained in for-profit prisons.

The Austin-based nonprofit Grassroots Leadership provides research and documentation on the growth of the for-profit prison system—a field dominated by Corrections Corporation of America and the GEO Group. U.S. policies that pay Mexico to catch refugees before they enter the U.S. and the use of for-profit prisons (with the financial incentive to keep them full) keep U.S.

citizens separated from refugees, making it harder to know them as individual people.

Second, organizing for humane immigration reform and to win just legal treatment for immigrants, especially those who are undocumented and their families. Two years ago President Obama attempted to move immigration reform forward through his executive actions on Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA) and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). In June, the deadlocked Supreme Court vote on DAPA ended Obama's immigration reform efforts by upholding a lower-court injunction. This is devastating for more than 16 million people in "mixed status" families living in the United States. Immigration attorneys agree that this should not affect the status of more than 800,000 young Dreamers protected by Obama's 2012 DACA action. However, since DACA is the result of an executive action rather than a law passed by Congress, the incoming president could rescind it.

Third, protecting immigrants from deportation. Several denominations have taken strong action in support of immigrants' needs. In June, the Presbyterian Church (USA) reaffirmed its commitment to the "the ministry of sanctuary" and for "those congregations that have supported and offered sanctuary to immigrants threatened with deportation."

Fourth, meeting people *before* they migrate and learning the complexities of why they leave. In 2015, I joined a pilgrimage to Honduras and Guatemala developed specifically to help U.S. citizens understand the factors that compel migration. Some U.S. policies set in place to protect multinational corporations contribute to conditions that compel migration.

In the 1980s, there were more than 500 sanctuary churches and synagogues, at least 19 sanctuary cities, 20 sanctuary universities, and one sanctuary state, New Mexico. How will we encounter the divine in the face of refugees today? What risks will we take in order to protect their lives? ■

Darlene Nicgorski is the author of Sandals and Sanctuary: The True Story of the Nun Tried by the Reagan Administration, due this fall.

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SNAPSHOT



Yvonne Delk, left, offers a blessing to Larycia Hawkins, a former Wheaton College professor who donned a hijab in solidarity with Muslims.

J.P. Keenan

Standing on the Shoulders

Faith leaders and other activists gathered in June in Washington, D.C., at the Sojourners-sponsored Summit to wrestle with the implications of race in justice work. Rev. Yvonne Delk, the first African-American woman ordained by the United Church of Christ and one of the elders honored at The Summit, spoke of the importance of building intergenerational relationships among justice leaders and remembering that we are never working alone. "I can do what I do because those who went before me did what they did," Delk said.

QUOTED

“A lot of times the image of activism is climbing the flagpole, being arrested—very dramatic. But I really try to remind people that a lot of the most important work is the daily work of trying to organize the community, and it's not as flashy or exciting.”

—Bree Newsome

on the first anniversary of her removal of the Confederate flag at the South Carolina Capitol
sojo.net/breenewsome

NEWS

#OrlandoStrong

Following the massacre in Orlando, Fla., LGBTQ Christians and their allies, including sojo.net authors, expressed grief, pointed to the religious roots of LGBTQ discrimination, and declared their determination to overcome hatred with love. In their own words ...



“Make no mistake: God is weeping with we who weep. ... My beautiful queer family, God is madly in love with us, even

unto death and for eternity. No commas, parentheses, or conditional clauses.”

—Joey Longley

“We all need to recognize the role of Christian supremacy, the logic of white supremacy, the presence of Islamophobia and anti-trans rhetoric, including anti-LGBT rhetoric, that has been perpetuated for years.”

—Robyn Henderson-Espinoza



“Hate seeks an unending circle of hate. But we cannot fall into hate's trap. Not in our hearts. Not in our actions. Not in our

politics.” —Rev. William J. Barber II

“The shooting in Orlando was horrific and has gotten our attention. But we must also pay attention to the acts of legislative and religious violence that occur on a daily, moment-by-moment basis (like the so-called ‘bathroom bills’) that tell people they are broken and do not belong.”

—Regina Shands Stoltzfus



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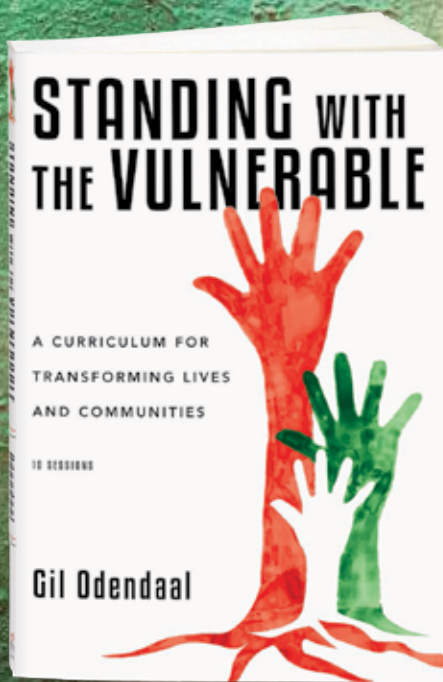
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How to Live in a Diverse Democracy

I SPEAK ON about 25 college campuses a year, which affords me a front row seat for current trends in identity politics. One of the things I've noticed is that when people say they are engaged in "diversity work," what they often mean is that they are busy mobilizing their preferred identity groups toward their approved politics. The main role they see for those on the other side is to be defeated.

But the real challenge of living in a diverse democracy is not dealing with the differences you like, it's working with the differences you don't like.

In his excellent new book, *Confident Pluralism*, John Inazu, a professor at Washington University Law School and board member of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, takes a long look at how to do this, with special attention to religious differences.

Disagreements with regard to religious matters are some of the most challenging ones around. That's because religion is about ultimate concerns. Not only do faith



Shutterstock

He is reminding us right off the bat that the stakes could not be higher.

Thankfully, Inazu is more optimistic than Rousseau. His prescription for living with the differences we don't like is both to be proud of our particularities (the *confidence* part of the title) and to recognize that building a common life together takes a great deal of energy and attention (the pluralism part). In other words, we do not have to give up essential things about who we are or how we believe in order to live well with people who believe and behave differently. But we cannot take such living well together for granted. Healthy, diverse societies do not magically appear; people work enormously hard, generation after generation, to build them.

Inazu's book is divided into two sections, constitutional commitments and civic practices. The constitutional-commitments section reminded me just how influential the courts are in this country, and just how lucky we are to inherit (and be able to improve upon) a constitutional tradition that took at least certain dimensions of diversity seriously.

The stories in the civic-practices section had the added bonus of containing immediately applicable lessons. I loved especially the stories about friendships between people who disagreed profoundly on some fundamental matters but chose to bracket these differences and find common ground. For instance, Kevin Palau, a conservative Christian evangelist, and Sam Adams, the first openly gay mayor of Portland, Ore., chose to put aside their disagreements on human sexuality and focus instead on civic engagement in their shared city. Had such a friendship not been formed, thousands of people in the Portland area would have gone without needed food, housing, and counseling.

Confident Pluralism is a reminder that—whatever our preferred groups and approved politics might be—bracketing disagreements and building friendships across divides is the essence of "diversity work" in our fractious republic. ■



Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about social justice from his perspective as a Muslim American.

Healthy, diverse societies do not magically appear.

traditions deal with issues—creation, salvation, morality, human purpose—that are inherently ultimate in nature, they imbue matters that may otherwise be viewed as mundane with a sense of ultimacy. That's not just a random group of people over there, that's the church, or the umma. That's not just any old piece of land, that's the place where the Second Temple once stood, or where Lord Rama was born.

Inazu opens his book with a sobering quote from the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau: "It is impossible to live at peace with those we regard as damned."



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Is it possible
to have safer
officers as
well as safer
streets for all
Americans?

Black and Blue

**In many neighborhoods, police are feared as “occupying forces.”
Some are working to change that from the inside.**

by RYAN HAMMILL

IN DECEMBER 2014, the white police chief of Richmond, Calif., showed up at a local protest against police brutality. The ethnically diverse city is infamous for its violent Iron Triangle neighborhood, but Chief Chris Magnus didn’t arrive at the protest to bust heads, or even to merely “keep an eye on” the assembly. Instead, he held a sign. It read, quite simply, “Black Lives Matter.”

The reaction was quick and intense—even the Richmond Police Officers Association issued a statement claiming Magnus had broken state law by “politicking” in uniform.

“I can understand how it is hard for a lot of police officers, especially given what has gone on in some of the protests,” Magnus said, according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Nevertheless, he doesn’t regret holding the sign. “I’d do it again,” he said. “[T]he idea that black lives matter is something that I would think that we should all be able to agree upon.”

Like Richmond’s police officers denouncing Magnus, negative national reactions to the Black Lives Matter movement have come quickly and decisively, replete with slogans such as “All Lives Matter” and “Blue Lives Matter,” which refers to police officers.

Kristopher Skinner, Associated Press



Chris Magnus, then the Richmond, Calif. police chief, joined a Black Lives Matter protest in December 2014.



When a white police chief showed up at a protest against police brutality, the reaction was quick and intense.

Chief Chris Magnus, above in uniform, risked scorn from his peers when he stood with other Black Lives Matter protesters.

Churches with “Black Lives Matter” signs have seen the word “black” defaced. Darren Wilson, the Ferguson police officer who shot and killed Michael Brown, received hundreds of thousands of dollars from online donors, as did George Zimmerman, the neighborhood-watch vigilante who killed Trayvon Martin.

In May, Louisiana took “Blue Lives Matter” to the next level when Gov. John Bel Edwards signed the “Blue Lives Matter” bill that added public safety workers to protected-class status for hate crimes legislation, thereby joining ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities. And in July, following the police shootings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile and the sniper killing of five Dallas police officers, protesters in Baton Rouge were met with armored tanks, percussion weapons, and the threat of being charged with the “hate crime” of obstructing police in response to their nonviolent actions.

This is the politics of polarization. Discussions on race in the United States too often behave according to Newton’s third law of motion: “To every action there is always opposed an equal reaction.” It’s true within the church as well: While 82 percent of black Protestants believe that police killings are part of a pattern, 73 percent of white mainline Protestants say the opposite—to them,

Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, Freddie Gray, and the hundreds of other unarmed black Americans killed by police are “isolated incidents.”

But what if “Blue Lives Matter” did not have to contradict “Black Lives Matter”? In other words, what if we saw reform not as a burden to police, but as a boon? Is it possible to have safer officers as well as safer streets for all Americans?

Police officers such as Magnus and others across the country—including Dallas police chief David Brown—are asking the question, and answering in the affirmative: Yes, it is possible.

Learning the value of community policing

Richmond’s own police department website admits that “It is no secret our community has struggled for decades with crime.” Home to a Chevron refinery and a Green Party mayor, opulence and poverty, this small industrial city near San Francisco offers a set of contrasts but also a story of hope, a story in which Magnus played a leading part (after 10 years in Richmond, Magnus became chief of the Tucson, Ariz. police force in January 2016).

In 2006, the year Magnus arrived in Richmond, the city of 100,000 suffered 42 homicides, which peaked the next year at

Kristopher Skinner, Associated Press

47. Richmond was considered the murder capital of the Bay Area and one of the 15 most dangerous cities in the U.S. By the time Magnus announced his departure, however, homicides had plummeted, bottoming out at 11 in 2014 and rising to 18 the next year, according to police department statistics. At the same time, the department's own use of force was relatively slight: After a 2007 fatal shooting by police, seven years passed before another occurred.

While technology such as ShotSpotter (which detects gunshots and immediately notifies police) has improved policing in Richmond, the department's preferred weapon in their war on crime is not really a weapon at all: It's a philosophy. Community policing is "the idea of the collective," Allwyn Brown, Magnus' former deputy and now his replacement as chief, told *Sojourners*. "It's the idea that community safety is not simply or only a job for police, but it's everybody's responsibility."

"It's not a made-up idea that policing in America against communities of color tends to look different than it does in other neighborhoods," Brown said. The conversation about police violence that Black Lives Matter has raised is "a conversation that we need to have," which requires acknowledging "the bad policing of the past," Brown said.

Chief Brown, an African American who grew up in the neighboring city of Oakland, never imagined himself as a police officer.

"When I was younger, my perception was that pretty much all the police officers were very large and very white males and they all sort of looked the same," he said. "They weren't smiling or friendly or interacting with people, they were just looking for stuff, or if there was a call, they showed up for that." But working nights at an East Oakland convenience store (while studying social science in college) enabled Brown to interact with officers who stopped in for coffee or snacks.

"And it struck me in those moments, like a slow-motion epiphany, that the cops looked different," he said. "They were people of color. There was a female [officer] who used to come through, and I thought, 'Wow! That's different—it has changed.'" Brown subsequently entered Richmond's police academy at age 20, and his rise to the top began in earnest in 2008 when Magnus promoted him from sergeant to captain,



Allwyn Brown, top, former deputy and now police chief of Richmond, Calif., says talking about police violence "is a conversation we need to have." Kelly McMillin, above, police chief in Salinas, Calif., wants better police training.

something that left him "humbled and honored," he said. Now, as chief, he wants to build on the progress the department made during Magnus' tenure.

"We created more open access, more transparency, which had the effect of raising trust in most neighborhoods, which is powerful because that's the engine that drives policing," Brown said.

The Richmond Police Department has the data to demonstrate the value of community policing, and it also has a record of working against the ideological polarization common to so many U.S. cities. Magnus' support for Black Lives Matter is one example; his efforts to oppose the growth of mass incarceration is another.

When Contra Costa County (which includes Richmond) received \$19 million in 2012 in a program called "realignment" to address California's prison overcrowding, Magnus publicly faced off with the county

sheriff over whether to expand jail facilities. Sheriff David Livingston campaigned to add 150 beds to a local jail, while citizens' activist groups, joined by Magnus, successfully opposed him.

While budget battles with the sheriff may seem ill-advised for a local police chief, expanding programs for those re-entering society from prison can reduce the desperation that leads to crime. As an added bonus, partnering with local activists improves trust between public and police.

"And raising trust means that you increase participation in the whole public safety process," Brown told *Sojourners*. "If we're able to do that, it makes us more effective. That's the secret right there." For Brown and the Richmond Police Department, "community policing is not a program or a project or a special unit." Rather, it is a "philosophy" and a vision: Safety is built not on further militarization, but on deeper trust.

A different way to look at Salinas

Similar efforts to transcend polarization have been unfolding two hours south of Richmond in Salinas, Calif., where government in the majority-Latino city has committed to a program called Healing-Informed Governing for Racial Equity. This commitment emerged out of meetings and trainings between city staff and community leaders following a six-month span in 2014 that saw four officer-involved shootings.

Kelly McMillin, chief of police in Salinas, met with MILPA (Motivating Individual Leadership for Public Advancement), one of the main organizing groups of the local police-accountability movement. "Often, cops have come to me and said that they feel like they are in a low-level war," said Chief McMillin, "always going from bad guy to bad guy." This is due in part to how officers are introduced to the city. "The police training officer will drive new recruits around, and say, 'Okay, here is this shopping plaza, this is where you will get shoplifters, burglars, vehicle accidents'—and that is how you start to look at Northridge Mall," McMillin said. But what if community leaders provided an introduction to the city instead?

"So with MILPA, I wanted a group that could give my officers a different tour of Salinas; I want [the officers] to see Salinas

through *their* lens,” said McMillin. “This plaza, this market, a packing shed, and what it is like to live and work here day to day.”

Beyond ‘kick ass and take names’

If Richmond and Salinas demonstrate the ability of leaders to resist systemic polarization, Anthony Campbell—an assistant chief in the New Haven, Conn. police department—demonstrates how that approach affects the heart as well. Campbell grew up in Harlem, in New York City. His father was a drug dealer and career criminal, while his mother was a Rikers Island corrections officer who sometimes worked shifts while Campbell’s father was incarcerated there. While Campbell grew up at-risk in the inner city, he managed to matriculate into Yale—it looked like the beginning of a classic “American Dream” story.

But after finishing school, Campbell watched his fellow graduates go off to the lucrative positions available to so many Ivy Leaguers, while he stayed in New Haven. Before falling in love with his now-wife, Campbell had hoped to become a Jesuit priest. With the priesthood out of the question for a married man, Campbell still felt the call to ministry, a call he followed—strange as it may seem—into the police academy. Having watched his father get straight (at least for a while) after jail stays, Campbell had considered becoming a prison minister or a corrections officer like his mother.

“You’re talking about addressing people once they are already part of the criminal justice system,” Campbell said of his mother’s reply. “Why not do something where you can touch their lives before they get involved?” she asked. “And lo and behold,” he told *Sojourners*, “right around [then], New Haven was starting community policing.”

Like Chief Brown in Richmond, Campbell sees community policing not as a supplemental program but as “a mindset that each officer has to have that ‘I’m not different than this community, but I’m part of it.’” As the assistant chief who oversees recruiting and training, Campbell said that this begins before a recruit even enters the academy.

“More often than not, if you look at many police department websites on recruitment and hiring, many of them have a ‘kick-ass and take-names’ type of attitude,” said Campbell. By contrast, “we



“We instruct our officers when they go on calls—check to make sure the kids have food.”

**—Anthony Campbell,
assistant chief, New Haven, Conn.**

make sure that they understand that they are going to be integrated into the community from day one.” They are exposed to multiple trainings and experiences designed to do this, including working at homeless shelters, training in implicit bias, and arranging family potlucks to expose recruits to cultural diversity. In addition, new officers are all required to spend one year walking a beat, where community members get to know the new officer, learn their names, and eventually begin calling them on their cell phones to report neighborhood problems directly.

Campbell also aims to instill in officers a concern for systemic injustice. “The last resort for us is the arrest,” he told *Sojourners*. “In many ways we try to instill in the mindset of our officers that it is a failure of the system—of which we are a part—when we have to make an arrest.” It is a stunning admission of humility on the part of a senior police officer. After all, in the minds of many, the arrest is the signature activity

of the police. How is that a failure?

Turns out, it all depends on how you view the ultimate aim of the police. Campbell explains that an arrest signifies “that we either had gotten there too late or we weren’t paying enough attention to hear the cry. Most of the time there are so many cries and signs before a crime occurs, that if we simply have our eyes and ears [open], often we would have picked up on.”

Raised in a broken system

Campbell’s own philosophy of systemic injustice was put to the test at a deeply personal level in 2006. When approaching a stopped car that other officers had cornered, the driver hit the accelerator and rammed Campbell, launching him 15 feet into the air and nearly killing him. Campbell was partially paralyzed as a result.

“It was heavy for me to go from a position of making \$90,000 a year to falling basically below the poverty line in the two-and-a-half years when I couldn’t work and was going through rehab,” he said.

Eventually, Campbell returned to the force, but then he did something even more impressive—he forgave his assailant.

“He didn’t have the same type of loving environment that I ultimately had,” Campbell said of the attacker, a man named Mark Andrews, “and he chose to try to find that in the form of a gang, and that led to our paths crossing and him almost taking my life.”

And whatever the cost was to Campbell, “those things don’t change the reality that 2,000 years ago a man named Jesus Christ died on the cross for my sins, for the ways in which I am deficient, for the ways in which I fall short, and that he forgave me,” Campbell said. So he limped into Andrews’ sentencing, told Andrews that he forgave him, and asked the judge to reduce Andrews’ sentence, a request the judge honored.

“Why are you giving this piece of garbage your mercy?” Campbell remembers the furious prosecutor asking. But Campbell does not regret it.

“I think it was probably one of the best things I’ve ever done,” Campbell said. “[Andrews] was raised in a system that is already broken, that already has him pegged as a lost person to begin with. I may have

New Haven city photo

been his victim, but in many ways he's already a victim of our society and its failures. So it only made sense to forgive him." The judge then allowed Andrews to reply. He apologized to Campbell.

"You're a good man and I see that," Andrews said, according to Campbell.

"That to me meant a lot," Campbell said. "It really did. It really meant a lot to me that he understood what I was doing and he appreciated it."

The ultimate proactive measure

Campbell's act of forgiveness went far beyond normal expectations, but it does lend a level of legitimacy to his view of systemic injustice and the impacts for policing. Even without this, however, for Campbell community policing is at minimum deeply pragmatic.

"Community policing is the ultimate proactive measure," he said. Just as someone who exercises and eats well doesn't have to worry about blood sugar and cardiovascular disease, if you look "at the totality of the system," you will see an increase in safety for everyone: community members and police officers together. Ways of doing this can be remarkably simple, even if unexpected.

"We instruct our officers, when they go on calls, especially if those calls involve children, to check the refrigerator—check to make sure the kids have food."

If we don't think of police officers' role as checking in on childhood nutrition, handing out their cell phone numbers to community members, partnering with police accountability groups, and standing in the way of mass incarceration, it is a failure of an imagination deadened by the sadly familiar logic of polarization.

The affirmation that "Black Lives Matter" should not be cheapened with chiding calls to say "All Lives Matter"—after all, this country has demonstrated a particular inability to care about black lives. But the slogans arising out of Ferguson, Staten Island, and elsewhere are not threats to blue lives or to effective policing. In point of fact, these calls can make for safer cops and safer streets. We'd be fools not to pay attention. ■

Ryan Hammill (@ryanahammill) is online assistant for Sojourners.

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White, Privileged, Fragile

**It's not easy to teach college students
about "social privilege." First step:
Start with my own.**

by **NATALIE WIGG-STEVENSON**

A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, while doing research on social privilege for an introductory ministry course, I came across an article titled "White Fragility." Even a skim of the first few pages was enough to pique my excitement. In it, author Robin DiAngelo—an expert in multicultural education—describes in sociological detail a common set of defensive and destructive responses that people have when facing the reality of their own privilege.

Illustration by Jon Krause



White privilege is an invisible package of unearned assets.

I recognized each response she described from those my students had whenever I asked them simply to face—let alone begin to dismantle—the various forms of social privilege they each embody. Where, I began to wonder, could I squeeze this article into an already over-packed course syllabus? How could it best help us navigate the difficult issues we were trying to engage?

Emptying ourselves

Social privilege is a daunting topic to engage. When teaching it, I draw heavily on Peggy McIntosh's now famous definition of its racial manifestation:

I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks.

What McIntosh helps us see is that social patterns of privilege are maintained because people carry them about and use them while, at the same time, people are able to carry about and use their privilege because those social patterns are maintained. The effect is cyclical, and it happens without any of us being particularly aware of our own complicity in the system.

Society confers unearned gifts on people who embody particular privileged traits—straight, white, able-bodied, middle-class men, for example—while neglecting to confer them on others. This isn't to say that people who embody more privilege are explicitly homophobic, racist, ableist, classist, or sexist. It doesn't mean they don't work hard for the goods they accumulate in life—of course, many do. It's just that it feels perfectly natural to walk through an open door without ever noticing how it swings shut in the face of the equally hardworking genderqueer Latinx whose wheelchair wouldn't even fit.

Indeed, because society is rigged this way, if a straight, white, able-bodied middle-class man wanted to recognize and share his privilege with others, he'd no doubt meet forms of resistance that make it awfully difficult to do.

Those who have ears to hear, listen, I think whenever I read McIntosh's description—because it sounds a lot like some ancient wisdom to me. The cultural discourse of



privilege helps us reimagine Paul's Christological hymn in Philippians 2 for our contemporary culture. No matter what status we arrive with in this world, to imitate Christ means to give that status up—to empty ourselves of it. Like Christ, when we do this, we'll no doubt meet resistance from others. Unlike Christ, when we seek this humble unity with him, this sharing in his mind and spirit, then we'll feel this resistance rise from within ourselves too.

Fragility

From my perspective as a theologian, DiAngelo's analysis describes one version of this internal resistance. Because white North Americans are largely protected from most forms of race-based stress, she argues, they unconsciously expect a pretty high level of "racial comfort" in their day-to-day experience. This expectation makes even the smallest amount of race-based stress feel catastrophic. Cultured to be exceedingly *fragile*, then, even the slightest mention of race in a given context can send whites into a tailspin. DiAngelo's data shows that the most common responses to this fragility include paralysis from action by overwhelming guilt; fearful, aggressive, and argumentative behaviors; use of the silent treatment; or, retreat from the situation entirely.

Of course, this fragility isn't restricted to race-based stress. The reason the concept of white fragility rang so true to me was because in teaching social privilege I had also observed the phenomena of male fragility, hetero fragility, able-bodied fragility, and so on. I had seen this range of defensive emotions and destructive behaviors run the gamut of privileged social positions.

DiAngelo therefore diagnoses a social problem that is also spiritual. She gives contour to the resistance that happens inside each heart that seeks to be united with Christ: *For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it* (Romans 7:19-20). Embodying the sinful patterns of this world—including those that hold together dynamics of social privilege—we become incapable of performing anything but those patterns.

The truly devastating blow in DiAngelo's argument, however, comes in the effects that this fragile disposition has on the social contexts in which its responses are exercised. When privileged people crumble under even the smallest threats to their privilege, their typical defensive reactions simply return things to the equilibrium of the status quo.

In other words, the fragility that privileged people feel actually maintains the heart of their privileged power. Out of fear and in our rage, we keep choosing to inhabit the world as it is rather than labor to bring about the world as God would have it be.

The concept of fragility helped me hear my students more empathetically and helped them communicate with each other.

A delicate balance

Prior to encountering DiAngelo's analysis of fragility, I had agonized over my syllabus in every semester. I'd tried to discern the gentlest way to introduce concepts of privilege, so that I neither overwhelmed those who most embodied it nor let them off the hook too easily. But this delicate balance of communicating complicity, without necessarily imposing culpability, is nearly impossible to pull off.

In one semester I emphasized the *personal* experience of privilege so much that students felt personally attacked and refused to engage course materials. In class comments and written assignments (not to mention course evaluations!), students oscillated between toxic anger and facilely naming their own privilege without making any moves toward dismantling it. I found these latter students' behavior most upsetting, as they scored "progressive points" for naming their privilege in a way that actually bolstered it.

The next semester I overcorrected, emphasizing the *social* dynamics of privilege instead. This left students feeling trapped by overwhelming, guilt-inducing forces of history and culture, which they experienced as voiding their own agency. Students are supposed to choose their ministry placements for the following year at the end of this course. Those who had entered the program fired up with concerns about radical social justice now wanted to choose a "safe" site. I'd inadvertently quashed their passions and rechanneled them toward goals that would have dismayed their former selves.

They weren't the only ones who were daunted by the experience, though. I, too, was considering abandoning this more radical line of teaching. My efforts at transformative pedagogy were increasing my privileged students' fragility rather than their humility, vulnerability, or willingness to partner with others for social justice and change. Whether my pedagogical perils induced feelings of anger or guilt, denial, defensiveness, or retreat, the effect was the same: Classroom conversation was immediately returned to the status quo control by the most-privileged students. What this meant was that, in the most frustrating turn of hydra-headed irony, every strategy I employed to chip away at dynamics of privilege instead initiated a process by which women, LGBTQ students, and students of color became further silenced.



I felt like I was doing more harm than good. Like my students, I felt ready to give up.

Diagnosing the problem

Here's the thing: Transformative education requires a high level of relational functioning in the classroom for it to work. It's a form of teaching that doesn't allow the teacher to rely solely on her own expertise. It doesn't place her at the front of the room doling out information to supposedly uninformed students. Transformative education, rather, rightly situates the classroom within the broader context of the class members' daily life story, acknowledging that everyone has a gift to bring to the shared journey of teaching and learning together.

In this model, teachers and students alike must listen and respond to each other with empathy and trust. This requires vulnerability. The idea, then, is that as we build these qualities together in the classroom, we are transformed to be agents of transformation in the world outside the classroom doors.

Critically, however, fragility is not the same thing as vulnerability.

Being able to name one's vulnerability, like being able to name one's privilege, carries a lot of social cachet in Christian circles these days. So the destructive fragility that more-privileged students experienced in our classroom invariably masqueraded as positive vulnerability—and prevented the empathy, trust, and genuine vulnerability required for transformation.

I needed some help to get us out of this bind. The concept of fragility gave me a framework for at least diagnosing the problem at hand by providing a structure to analyze the intricacies of students' responses. Using the lens of fragility, what had previously appeared as an undifferentiated rush of irrational anger could now be seen as a series of discrete emotional and behavioral—and, we might say, spiritual—responses.

So when a white male student threw up his hands and snidely described himself as *the enemy*, closing the small space into which the middle-aged Korean woman was trying to narrate her experiences of sexism and racism, I had a framework for gently resisting his resistance. Later, when that same woman refused the language of *cisgender* that her transgender colleague was introducing to make sense of his life experience, and her genderqueer colleague was using to make sense of theirs, I had a framework for understanding how difficult it was for this woman to hear for the first time that her gendered oppression was also a form of gender privilege.

In this way, the concept of fragility helped me begin to hear my students more empathetically, communicate with them more effectively, and help them communicate with each other. By diagnosing the fragility for



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what it is, we become able to respond to it with empathy and thereby begin to turn that fragility into the type of vulnerability that is crucial for transformation.

Teacher, teach thyself

As a teacher, the particular challenge of this kind of classroom is that each student is at a different point in their own journey in relation to understanding, engaging, and dismantling their social privilege. Each student is at a different place in the journey of turning their defensive and destructive fragility into the open and empathic vulnerability that is required for social change.

But here's the kicker: So, too, am I.

In a moment of painful honesty with myself, I had to realize that the dynamic DiAngelo describes wasn't just familiar to me because I witness it in my students. This fragility is familiar to me because I've experienced it in myself, too.

Each time I've taught this course, I have been at a different point in my journey toward turning from the insecurity of my own brittle fragility to the surprising security of genuine, open vulnerability. Each time I teach this course, I'm at a different point in the journey of living into the liberation from guilt that Christ works in me so that I don't have to strive—and fail—to fix myself in God's image. I'm at a different point of letting God work in me.

I recently was asked to name the most surprising lesson from my first few years of being a professor. My response: I knew I'd need to work on my scholarship and teaching, but I had no idea how much I'd need to work on my *self*. Better put, I had no idea how much I'd need to lean on Christ's working in me. Whenever I was challenged in class, I'd feel a panicked, protective reflex to shore up my own power. I'd go on the defensive. I'd lock it down.

This meant that the hardest thing about teaching students how to dismantle their own privilege has been learning how to do it for myself.

I have the privilege of teaching this course again next fall. It will offer me yet another chance to open myself to the Spirit's work in me. When my students pick up that overstuffed syllabus and see the reading on white fragility mixed in with readings by McIntosh and others, they probably won't know that it's there for me as much as it's there for them. They'll probably never know just how much I, too, need the reminder to be vulnerable instead of fragile—that I need just as much help as they do to stay engaged in that process of mutual transformation with them.

Perhaps next year will be the year I feel sufficiently secure to be vulnerable enough to tell them. ■

*Natalie Wigg-Stevenson teaches contextual theology at Emmanuel College in Toronto and is the author of *Ethnographic Theology: An Inquiry Into the Production of Theological Knowledge*.*

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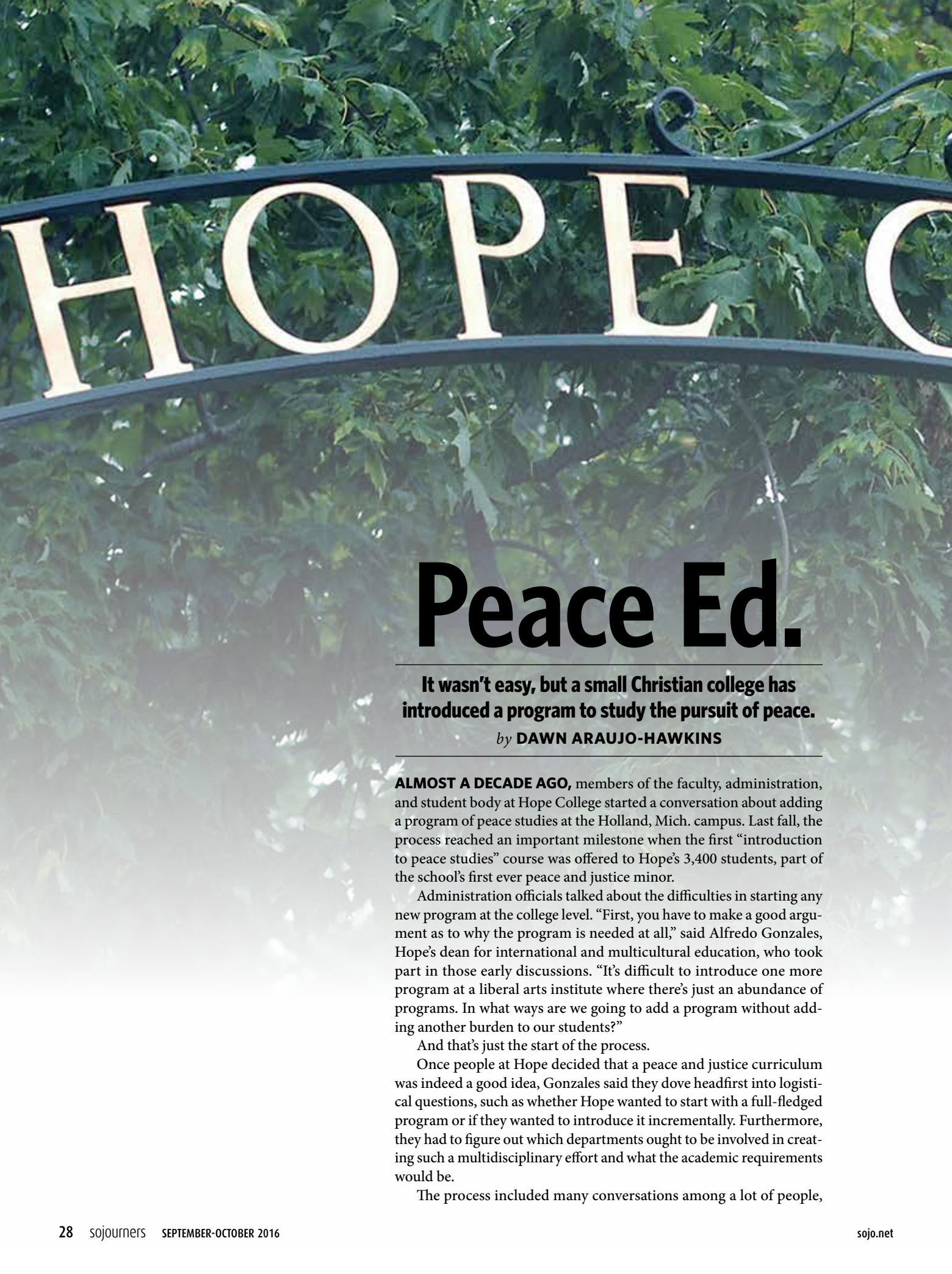
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HOPE

Peace Ed.

It wasn't easy, but a small Christian college has introduced a program to study the pursuit of peace.

by **DAWN ARAUJO-HAWKINS**

ALMOST A DECADE AGO, members of the faculty, administration, and student body at Hope College started a conversation about adding a program of peace studies at the Holland, Mich. campus. Last fall, the process reached an important milestone when the first “introduction to peace studies” course was offered to Hope’s 3,400 students, part of the school’s first ever peace and justice minor.

Administration officials talked about the difficulties in starting any new program at the college level. “First, you have to make a good argument as to why the program is needed at all,” said Alfredo Gonzales, Hope’s dean for international and multicultural education, who took part in those early discussions. “It’s difficult to introduce one more program at a liberal arts institute where there’s just an abundance of programs. In what ways are we going to add a program without adding another burden to our students?”

And that’s just the start of the process.

Once people at Hope decided that a peace and justice curriculum was indeed a good idea, Gonzales said they dove headfirst into logistical questions, such as whether Hope wanted to start with a full-fledged program or if they wanted to introduce it incrementally. Furthermore, they had to figure out which departments ought to be involved in creating such a multidisciplinary effort and what the academic requirements would be.

The process included many conversations among a lot of people,



Gonzales told *Sojourners*, but he said he knew it would be worth it, and that a peace studies program was a natural fit for a school affiliated with the Reformed Church in America. “If we look at our mission statement, it says that Hope College is to educate students for lives of service and leadership in global society,” he said. “So in that framework, this program looks at questions of reconciliation in a world that is deeply torn and is injuring people from the very youngest to the very oldest in ways that we don’t even understand yet.”

Drawing on best practices

In a sense, peace studies is part of Hope College’s legacy: Iconic peace activist A.J. Muste graduated from Hope in 1905. The Dutch-American Muste would go on to be executive director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation—an interfaith peace organization—and to mentor Martin Luther King Jr. In the late ’50s, Muste protested New York City’s civil defense drills alongside Catholic Worker co-founder Dorothy Day, and in 1964, Muste participated in a retreat with a group of renowned peace activists, including Trappist monk Thomas Merton and Jesuit priest Daniel Berrigan.

As an academic field, *irenology*—the study of peace—is thought to have its formal genesis in mid-20th century Europe with the advent of peace research institutes. In the United States, the first institutions to teach peace were colleges and universities with ties to the historic peace churches: the Mennonites, the Quakers, and the Church of the Brethren.

There are various theories and concepts within the field—for example, some programs emphasize practical skills while others highlight philosophies—but the basic idea is this: Peace studies looks at the causes of violence and oppression and seeks to find solutions that promote justice and minimize violence.

To figure out what Hope College’s peace studies program would ultimately look like, faculty examined the approach taken at small liberal arts schools with established peace programs—such as Earlham College in Indiana. They also reviewed programs at their sister school, Meiji Gakuin University, in Tokyo and at their partnership school, Liverpool Hope University, in England.

Adopting what they considered best practices and discarding the rest, Hope put together its program: for now, a minor

“We talk of Jesus as a prince of peace, not as the prince of wealth or capitalism or militarism.”

**—Thomas Arendshorst,
peace studies professor
at Hope College**



consisting of an introduction to peace studies course, 12 credit hours of electives, and, lastly, the capstone Christianity and the Quest for Peace.

Hope's communications, religion, political science, and sociology departments collaborated to create the program and, by design, students are required to choose their electives from at least two of the fields. In this way, Gonzales said, students won't be able to pigeonhole themselves into a single area.

"We want people to have a more comparative approach," he said. "At the very end of the minor, we hope that they would have the competencies, the knowledge, the awareness, and certainly the understanding of how peace studies interconnects with historical issues and, perhaps more important, the contemporary conflicts that are emerging in many parts of the world."

'Kind of a no brainer'

In fall 2015, six students—all of them women—signed up for the inaugural introductory course, taught by retired ophthalmologist-turned-educator Thomas Arendshorst.

"I see my course as a foundation from which students can be empowered to understand how other courses and knowledge relate to peace," said Arendshorst, who was recruited by Hope College specifically to teach in the peace studies program. "My course pushes students to advance their critical-learning skills and to see the intersections between prevalent society and the priorities of justice and peace."

Arendshorst's own journey to peace studies was slightly unorthodox. Before retiring

from his ophthalmology practice in 2004, he volunteered for the boards of nonprofits in the Holland area. Working on the boards, he said, got him thinking more about justice and advocacy and how he could contribute.

"I was interested in having something better than just opinions to offer," he said, "and I sort of serendipitously found the

"Studies of peace and justice in a Christian college seem to be kind of a no-brainer."

University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies."

Arendshorst enrolled in a master's program at the Kroc Institute in 2004, graduating two years later—just when Gonzales and his colleagues were beginning to seriously talk about a peace studies program at Hope College. In 2013 Hope invited Arendshorst to join the peace studies planning process and, ultimately, he was asked to teach the program's gateway course.

Like Gonzales, Arendshorst said it made perfect sense that a Christian institution such as Hope would have a peace studies program. "We talk of Jesus as a prince of peace, not as the prince of wealth or capitalism or militarism," he said. "So I think to have studies of peace and justice in a Christian college would seem to be kind of a no-brainer."

Because he teaches Hope College's introductory peace studies course, Arendshorst said he hones in on the most basic facts before getting into any of the theories and

concepts; he wants his students to understand the oft-ignored reality that peace studies is a legitimate, evidence-based field of study. "As it turns out," he said, "there's a wealth of information that strongly argues that our longstanding ideas of how to maintain peace through violence and how to regulate society through coercion is quite ineffective."

Once students understand that peace studies is a genuine academic field with a developed body of knowledge, Arendshorst said they can then start building their peace vocabulary. And once they've built their peace vocabulary, they are then able to examine recent history, parsing apart the idea of war and the ambitions that cause it.

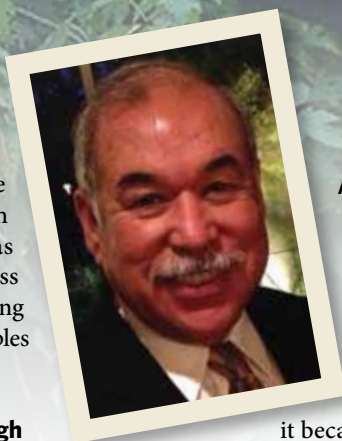
Arendshorst likes to focus on history because he thinks much of history is disregarded for the sake of science and technology in the current educational system. But in order to understand what's happening in the world today, he said, you have to understand what happened in the past.

"We talk about the changing patterns of war—what analysts call 'new wars' that don't fit the old paradigms of one national state fighting against another for some kind of territorial gain," he said. "Most of the wars being fought now don't have anything to do with those old schemes. And that's part of why even extremely strong and efficient military systems are finding they can't accomplish much with war."

The course also looks at international peace processes, the United Nations and other ideas of world governance, the development of human rights and the progression of conflict resolution to conflict transformation.



Students also explore peacebuilding, which Arendshorst defines as “the deep, broad process of developing transforming relationships among peoples and between peoples.”



Alfredo Gonzalez, dean of international and multicultural education for Hope College, was an early supporter of the peace studies program.

Seeing the world through a new lens

Aura Romero, one of the four women to ultimately complete Arendshorst's class, said it changed her way of thinking about the world. “I hadn't even imagined there were theories about peace,” she said. “I didn't know there were different ways to look at peace or ways to understand it.”

Romero came to Hope College from Querétaro, Mexico, and because she was only studying in Michigan for a year, she wasn't able to complete all the requirements for the peace and justice minor. However, the aspiring UNESCO officer who graduated with an education degree in June said she's now thinking about a graduate program at the Kroc Institute.

“This course inspired me to change reality,” Romero said. “Even though I've learned about politics and economics, I get sad when I see that the actual system is not working or that power corrupts people—at least in my country. But now I know that there's hope and there have been movements. It's all part of a historical process that will eventually change. I think that's pretty hopeful.” Likewise, Hope College junior Gabrielle Werner, who also took Arendshorst's class last fall, said she now looks at the world

through a different lens. She initially signed up for it because she was curious about the peace process.

“I wanted to know if there was a way to solve conflict without violence because I hadn't heard of any successful ways,” the sociology major said. “So when I heard about peace studies, I immediately thought, ‘Well, if that's possible, does it actually work?’”

Since completing Hope's intro course, Werner has become a believer. “It's probably been the class that has changed my life the most,” she said. This summer, Werner was one of a group of Hope College students who spent two weeks studying post-conflict reconciliation in Rwanda, a nation that, sadly, has much to offer by way of case study. A number of nationwide efforts promoting reconciliation in the wake of the 1994 genocidal killing spree have resulted in a country that is still deeply hurting but that has also made major steps toward peace.

The tools to make it happen

What was most remarkable to the Hope College cohort, said Gonzales, who also went on the Rwanda trip, was that today genocide survivors are able to walk, work, and live alongside known perpetrators. “The words of love and forgiveness that we heard

were just amazing,” he said, adding that their conversations made real for them why understanding and advocating for peace is so important.

“I think we came away with a sense that there's not a passive need for peace and justice,” he said, “but there is a critical need for an educated society to learn how to not only live with the other but to grow with the other, whoever the other may be.”

And Gonzales said that's what Hope College wants to foster through its peace studies program: an educated society that not only understands the need for peace but that also has the tools to make it happen.

The program is only in its infancy, but so far the results have been positive. When asked if the course was worth it, Romero's face lit up and she let out a gasp. “I really loved it,” she said.

Romero said that Hope students should take Arendshorst's introductory peace studies class even if they don't intend to complete the entire peace and justice minor. “For people who want to change the world, I say take it, because you'll find inspiration,” she said. “You'll find the theory to support what you're fighting for.” ■

Dawn Araujo-Hawkins (@dawn_cherie), a former Sojourners editorial assistant, is a staff writer for the Global Sisters Report in Kansas City, Mo.

Petition

You who sees through our windows like light,
sees the thoughts we hide in the oven of ourselves,

hears us freeze on the staircase between *yes* and *no*,
you who knows the betrayal inside every word,

speak to me in sleep what waking I cannot hear.
Show me the flames, the house falling of its own weight,

the terrible boxcars, and if there are still jewels
in the world, let there be so many

there's no need to pocket a single one
When the world shrinks to a leaf underfoot,

to a beggar's soiled trousers
and the punk who kicks him awake,

when love's drudgery grows blind to its own miracle,
you who hides in thick leaves that fall

and mulch the earth, who speaks in bird shadow,
cloud script, the toothless spit of the old—

open the storehouse of wonder,
mix the palette of sleep, till on waking

the world, even in darkness, is so present
there is nothing to hide, withhold or hoard.

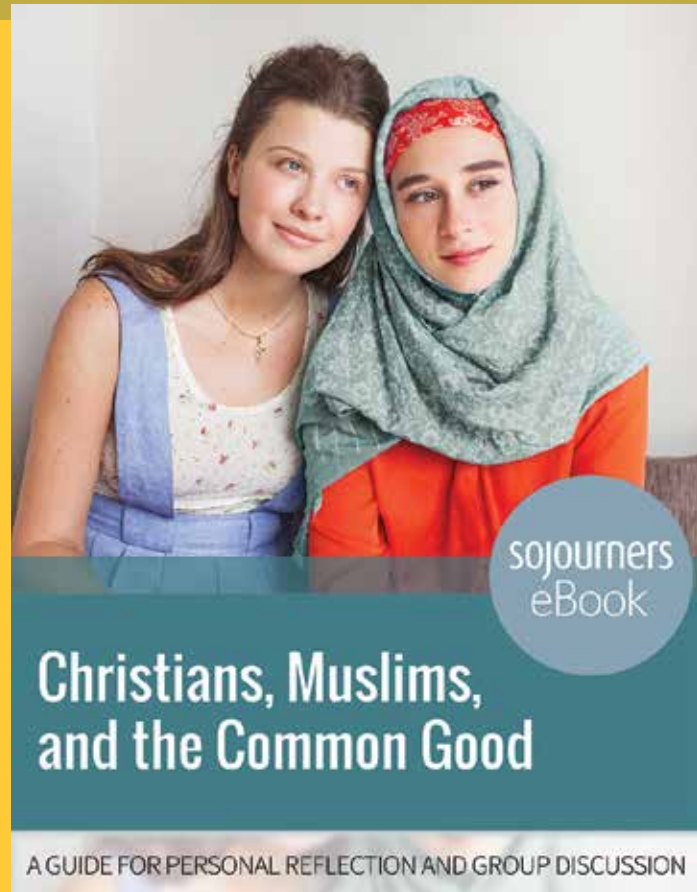
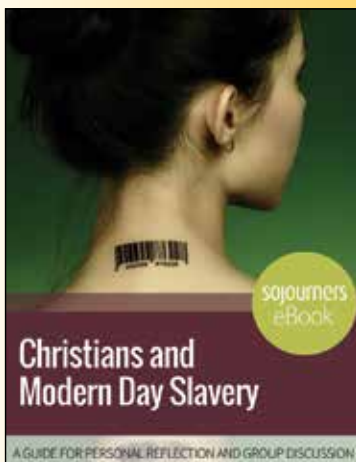
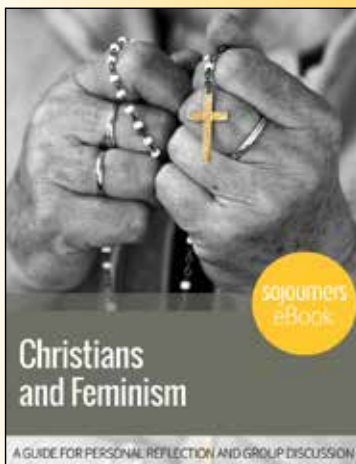
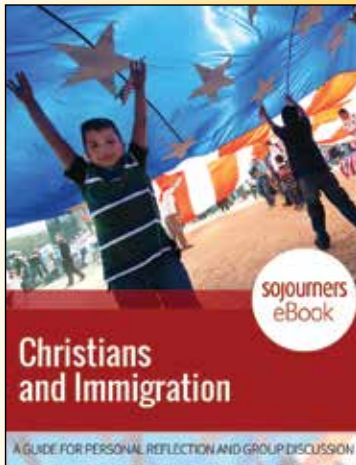
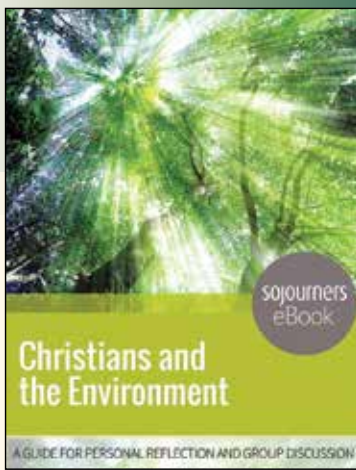
Let the banging shutter sing,
and the storm-riven tree shake its tangled locks.

Invisible host, ghostwriter, spirit grocer,
it isn't for riches I ask, but awe.

Betsy Sholl, a former poet laureate of Maine, is author of several collections of poetry, including Otherwise Unseeable (2014). She lives in Portland, Maine. Photo by Shutterstock

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from the editors of *Sojourners*



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In 2000, sophomore Onaje X.O. Woodbine was Yale basketball's leading scorer and one of the top 10 players in the Ivy League. From the outside it must have seemed like a dream come true for a young man who grew up playing street ball in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston.

But Woodbine felt isolated and excluded by the white players on the team, troubled by what he's described as "a locker-room culture that encouraged misogyny," and hungry to focus on his studies and wrestle with deeper philosophical and theological questions. So he quit basketball.

Woodbine eventually returned to the courts of his youth as a researcher, studying the practice and culture of street basketball for his doctoral studies in religion at Boston University. Woodbine is the author of *Black Gods of the Asphalt: Religion, Hip-Hop, and Street Basketball* (Columbia University Press) and a teacher of philosophy and religious studies at Phillips Academy in Andover, Mass. He spoke with *Sojourners* senior associate editor Julie Polter in May.

**An interview with
ONAJE X.O. WOODBINE
on the grace, power,
and transcendence
of street basketball.**

SACRED



COURTS

You go to an NBA game, it's a spectacle. But in street ball, it's a communal activity.

Julie Polter: What led you to study street basketball from a religion scholarship angle?

Onaje X.O. Woodbine: When I was 12 years old, I lost my coach. He was my father figure; I didn't have my father for most of my early childhood. It was just devastating.

I went to the court the next day to look for him. I felt his presence in that space. It was really the only place, looking back, where I felt safe, I felt whole, where I felt like my inner life was valuable, where there was a whole community whose interest was in my growth as a human being.

When I ended up at Boston University, I realized that basketball was a vehicle for my transformation throughout my whole life. It's not just about economic mobility. There's really a quest for meaning in these spaces. Everything that makes us human, these big questions: Who am I? What happens after you die? What is my purpose?

That's what's overlooked in the [previous] literature about street basketball, usually written by a journalist or a social scientist who is focused on what determines black behavior, the external environment. They miss the freedom and the meaning that is being created in these spaces. Religion really gives you a language to express and conceptualize that internal life of the individual in ways that you can't do with social science.

You write that in the early to mid-20th century, basketball became a means of uplift and cultural resistance in black communities and was especially encouraged by the black churches. Today's street basketball is not connected to the church in the same way. Why?

Pre-civil rights movement, basketball was a stylized expression of resistance against white supremacy for black people. The black church led the charge: They turned Bible study groups into basketball teams; it was a way to keep black men in the church. But at the end of the civil rights movement, as the black middle class moved outside of the black community and found opportunities elsewhere, a vacuum arose and the church no longer played this central role, especially with young African-American men's lives. The streets filled this vacuum and different role models took the place of the church leader. The basketball court became one of those central tools where black men could affirm their humanity, despite all of the violence around.

Christianity and Islam, the beliefs and doctrines and the church, still play a role within the game today. [Young men] might write a Bible verse on their hand or their shoes. Or they might experience some kind of

transcendence and attribute it to Jesus. But it is much more fluid, experiential, not dogmatic.

You believe that street basketball is a channel for individual and collective grief. What are its power and limits?

First it gives access to memory, the kind that we hold in our bodies that is not necessarily conscious. There are injuries that have to do with the history of race and gender that we take for granted over time. It becomes second nature. You're walking in the street and you have this tough look on your face because you're protecting yourself from harm, and you just sort of embody it over time. To be able to put those assumptions in abeyance for a moment is what the game allows you to do.

One of the things that could be improved upon is the presence of elders around the space of the court. What I found is that the young people who grieved and found it transformative always had the witness of, usually, a woman on the sidelines—an elder woman who showed empathy and gave the player a reflection or a mirror that the young man possessed the qualities of love [demonstrated through his grief]. That false mask of masculinity that they carry around, the elder woman gives them permission to let it go.

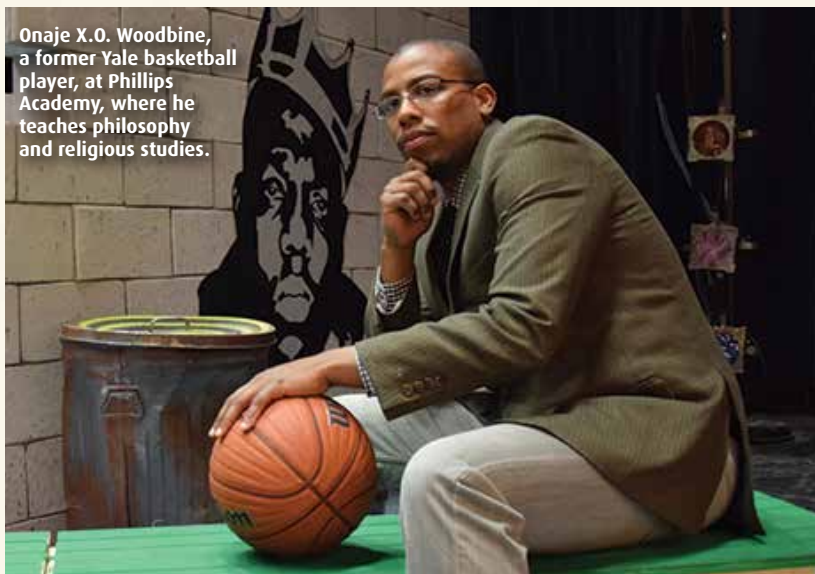
Many of the times players would go on the court, have this experience, but nobody was there to recognize it—they were grieving on their own. But other times a person, usually a woman on the sidelines, would just start crying. One of the guys said, I looked over and she was in tears, and that was the best feeling of my life. It's just so important that people provide witness to these experiences so that when [grieving players] re-enter the world, something has been accomplished.

What role do the male coaches play?

The father figures give the young men a sense of responsibility, accountability, and an image of themselves, what it means to potentially be a responsible young man. There are so many false images of being a man in the industry that to have that presence is sacred. This is one of the things that really shocked me when I got to college—that coaching was like a business. You [as a player] were expendable labor at that point. As a system, it removes this aspect of coaching and teaching that was so prevalent in the inner city. That's also one of the reasons I didn't want to play college basketball anymore.

How does street ball serve as resistance to centuries of white people commodifying black people's bodies?

Onaje X.O. Woodbine, a former Yale basketball player, at Phillips Academy, where he teaches philosophy and religious studies.



You don't pay to play street ball. The audience members are not just observers in street ball. You go to a college game or an NBA game, it's a spectacle. But in street ball, it's a communal activity. The players, the boundaries are permeable. Players go into the audience; audience members go onto the court. The music is the heartbeat of everything and brings everyone together. [The community's] not there to misappropriate your body, to treat you like a spectacle. They're there to nurture and support the affirmation of your humanity.

Almost every tournament [I observed] was a memorial for someone who passed away. None of the tournaments are named after NBA players; none of the teams are named after NBA teams. They were all issues, existential issues, so Save R Streets Summer Classic, Community Awareness Tournament, C-Murder Tournament—which is named after this kid nicknamed C-Murder [who was killed trying to break up a fight]. They were all issues directly impacting the community.

This past spring you wrote an essay in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* about your experience playing for the Yale basketball team and questions it raised for you about misogyny and racism.

Ofentimes we make the mistake of thinking about sports as separate from society, as being this citadel of racial brotherhood or sisterhood where it's just recreation. In fact, it reflects the larger social world. Quarterbacks are usually white men. If you walk with a feminine body as a male in the locker room or on the field, you are considered marginalized or outcast. We had a locker room, especially in my first year, where on a daily basis guys would talk about sexual conquests. It'd be a way of identifying yourself as a man. All of those things were present in my experience in college basketball.

[But] there's good news, there's a silver lining there, precisely because sports are embedded in the culture: We can use the game to transform it. Those aren't mutually exclusive. This goes back to the theme that I talked about earlier in regard to the inner city, that there's freedom there, there's agency there. These are human beings with the capacity to transform society. I think sports can be a powerful tool for social activism and transformation.

Some argue that college athletes in lucrative football and basketball programs should receive a share of the profits. What do you think?

It's a tough question, because on the one hand you don't want it to turn into a business, even though it is a business. But does paying players then make it

okay for coaches to treat them like employees, who can be fired? I think there has to be some sort of compromise.

In the NBA, half of the revenue goes to the players' salaries. So if you were to do something similar in college sports, where you take half of the revenue, but instead of paying players directly you use that money to enhance their education. Also nonprofit charity, because many of these guys are coming from the inner city: Give them some power to direct some of that money back home and into their communities. Use that money to truly educate these young men, even if they're there for [just] a year. That's a healthy compromise that still forces schools to treat these young men as students, as amateurs, and yet recognize how much revenue they help create.

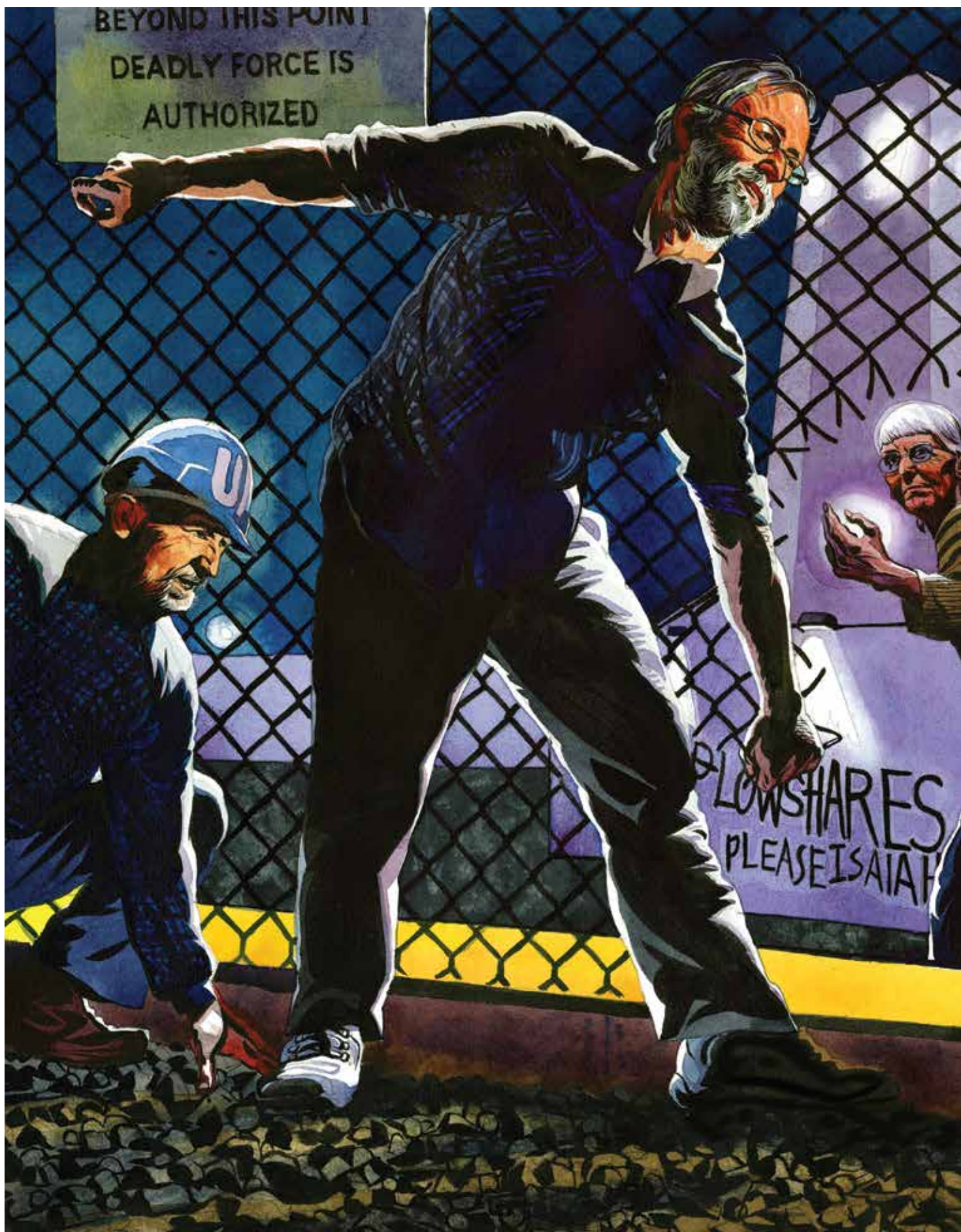
You've co-written a play based on your research. Why?

Through this process of writing the play and then producing it, I've discovered that theater is much like ritual and sports. It provides young people with freedom to embody stories and to discover their own identities within those stories and express them in public. What we're trying to do is to turn the theater into a ritual so that the audience members are not just observing. So in this play, the audience is part of the production. We want them to grieve with us in this space. We hope it's another way to bring people into these stories and potentially rework some of their own issues around race and gender.

What gives you hope?

What gives me hope is that you can find religion in strange places. In places where you would never expect to find it, in the projects and the inner city, on a basketball court, people are affirming their humanity, they're asking big questions. It's amazing that the resilience of the human spirit means that no matter where people are, they have some control over their inner life. ■

On inner-city basketball courts, people are affirming their humanity, they're asking big questions.



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Julie Polter reviews *The Third Reconstruction*

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Beau Underwood on
Varieties of Gifts

By Rosalie G. Riegler

An 82-Year-Old Nun Did **What?**

A protest at a Tennessee weapons plant laid bare the deceptions of the nuclear age.

DAN ZAK WAS FIRST struck by the absurdity of it all. As a reporter for *The Washington Post*, he was fascinated to learn that Sister Megan Rice, Michael Walli, and Greg Boertje-Obed had crossed forested hills in the middle of the night in Oak Ridge, Tenn., and reached the center of a government complex where possibly the most dangerous material in the world is enriched and stored.

Then Zak was captured by what was behind their action—the dramatic secrecy in the development of the first atomic bomb, the tragedy of its testing on U.S. soldiers and on the unsuspecting inhabitants of the Marshall Islands, the bungling bureaucracy surrounding the entire nuclear industry, and finally the hope and resilience of the resisters who work to eliminate these perilous weapons. His book *Almighty: Courage, Resistance, and Existential Peril in the Nuclear Age* (Blue Rider Press) is the result.

Rice, Walli, and Boertje-Obed called their action the Transform Now Plowshares, following a tradition of serious faith-inspired nonviolent actions dating back to 1980, actions often successful in reaching their nuclear targets and resulting in prison terms.

In July 2012, the trio cut through several fences—aided by malfunctioning motion sensors—at times moving through bright floodlight and past signs warning, “Deadly force authorized.” They hung a banner on one fence that proclaimed the words that were the source of their action, the injunction from Isaiah to “hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks” (2:4).

They arrived at Y-12, a building that stores 800,000 pounds of weapons-grade uranium, the material that undergoes fusion when a nuclear bomb is detonated. Using traditional Plowshares action symbols, they streaked the white walls with the blood of activists, spurted from baby bottles they carried in their backpacks. They painted the building with the phrases “Woe to the empire of blood” and “The fruit of justice is peace.” They chipped away at the concrete walls with small hammers, and they waited.

Finally, a guard drove up and saw the three, hands outstretched and empty. Kirk Garland knew peace protesters, as he had worked for the Rocky Flats weapons plant in Colorado, so he didn’t fire but called for backup.

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An artist’s rendering of the moment three Catholic protesters breached a fence at the nuclear facility at Oak Ridge, Tenn.

Illustration by Jeffrey Smith

New & Noteworthy



From *How to Let Go of the World...*

AT THE CORE

Director Josh Fox traveled to 12 countries on six continents to explore what humanity holds close in the face of climate change. The result is the sobering and inspiring documentary *How to Let Go of the World and Love All the Things Climate Can’t Change*. how-toletgomovie.com

DO JUSTICE

Soong-Chan Rah and Gary VanderPol explore post-World War II motivators to social concern in *Return to Justice: Six Movements That Reignited Our Contemporary Evangelical Conscience*. From John Perkins’ life story to the power of globalized Christianity, history that empowers. Brazos Press

NOT-SO-GREAT DIVIDES

In *Hope for Common Ground: Mediating the Personal and the Political in a Divided Church*, theological ethicist Julie Hanlon Rubio proposes ways Catholics from across the political spectrum can work together on contentious issues. Georgetown University Press

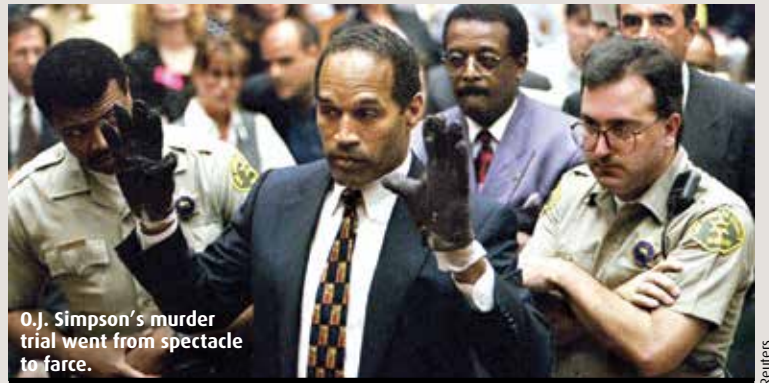
A PLACE TO BEGIN

Race in a Post-Obama America: The Church Responds is a primer on racism and its contemporary manifestations that can serve as a starting point for congregations discerning a positive way forward. Multiple contributors, edited by David Maxwell, foreword by Otis Moss III. WJK

When Journalism Jumped the Shark

IN THE FIRST half of 2016, O.J. Simpson, who still resides in a Nevada prison for his bungled robbery of sports memorabilia, seemed to be everywhere. First, there was the FX series “The People vs. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story,” a high-quality, behind-the-scenes dramatization of Simpson’s 1995 murder trial. Then came “O.J.: Made in America,” a seven-and-a-half hour epic ESPN documentary in which director Ezra Edelman finally gives the Simpson story its due as a landmark event in the history of U.S. attitudes toward race, celebrity, and domestic violence, and in the evolution of our mass media culture.

Among other things, the O.J. Simpson murder trial marked the end of an era in which professional journalists observed events, then summarized and framed them into a coherent narrative for public consumption. This legacy of the print age persisted well into the broad-



national melodrama. True, CNN also went wall-to-wall on things such as the Iran-Contra investigations and the first Iraq war, but in the months between legitimate big events it also whipped up essentially local stories, such as child disappearances or shark attacks, into manufactured national crises.

In 1991, noting that judges all over the country were allowing video cameras into their courtrooms, journalist and lawyer Steven Brill started Court TV to present sensational true crime stories as they happened. That same year computer scientists opened for public use something they were calling the World Wide Web.

So the media stars and planets were all aligned on that fateful June night in 1994 when, as a civil court jury found three years later, O.J. Simpson caused the wrongful deaths of his ex-wife and her friend.

As Edelman’s epic mini-series proves, the Simpson case was a genuine national tragedy. In one strand of the story we see Simpson, a black man who succeeded in the white man’s world on the strength of his talent, brains, and winning personality. The other strand is the story of the African-American community in Los Angeles and its decades of abuse by the local police and courts. The tragic irony was delivered

when the two strands came together in an L.A. criminal court in 1995. There Simpson, who is quoted as having once said, “I’m not black; I’m O.J.,” had to defend himself by hooking his case onto the narrative of black oppression.

It’s a tale worthy of Theodore Dreiser or Toni Morrison, or Sophocles for that matter. But on America’s TV screens, and in the embryonic chat rooms of the nascent internet, it degenerated into an orgy of gossip, glitter, and gotcha.

O.J. Simpson was acquitted in that criminal court on Oct. 3, 1995, and in the next decade U.S. media culture plunged into the abyss. In 1996, MSNBC and Fox News appeared, and a gossip website called the Drudge Report was launched. Two years later, all practice of politics and government as we knew it faded behind a crazed obsession with the appalling details of President Bill Clinton’s sex life. Then came reality TV and social media and a twittering apprentice running for president.

CNN founder Ted Turner, safe behind his billions, must sometimes wonder at what he has wrought. ■



Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel White Boy.

O.J. Simpson was acquitted in 1995, and in the next decade U.S. media culture plunged into the abyss.

cast era. Until the late 20th century, live, real-time TV coverage was limited to things like sporting events, inaugurations, and moonshots, or national disasters. Otherwise, the world was presented to TV viewers in one neat, 30-minute daily package at 6 p.m.

Like everything else in American culture, this started to change as cable replaced over-the-air broadcasting and specialty channels proliferated. In 1979, C-SPAN started running gavel-to-gavel coverage of the generally somnolent proceedings of the U.S. Congress. But CNN came along the next year to make things such as a toddler falling down a well in Texas into a

Continued from Page 39

He listened as they read their statement: “A loving and compassionate Creator invites us to take the urgent and decisive steps to transform the U.S. empire, and this facility, into life-giving alternatives. ... Blood reminds us of the horrific spilling of blood by nuclear weapons.”

Finally, other guards arrived and took them to jail. The final act of their resistance had begun—the long ordeal of trial, conviction, appeal, and finally release.

Behind the usual euphemisms

This became the most famous Plowshares action against nuclear weapons, mostly because it had revealed the woefully inadequate security in this and other “nuclear security” sites.

At trial for the break-in, before Michael Walli took the oath to “tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth,” he questioned whether, in a U.S. courtroom, he would even be allowed to use words that tell the truth. And in a sense, that’s what Dan Zak’s book is all about—the use of words to tell or to obscure the truth about the ways nuclear bombs can destroy the earth.

Almighty reads like a novel, with flashbacks and shameful details and sudden changes in style and subject worthy of the best contemporary fiction. But it’s anything but fiction. It’s an exploration of the truth about nuclear weapons and the multifarious words used to hide that truth.

Almighty forces the reader to focus on where truth is spoken. Is it in the prophetic voices from the Plowshares movement? Or is it in the words the government uses to talk about and fund what is truly unthinkable and mostly out of sight—the existential peril of the still-present nuclear age?

Early in the development of the nuclear bomb, Congress passed its management to for-profit business contractors and “created a thicket of [agencies] to shield and shepherd” it. Consequently, Congress never uses its (many) words to debate strategy and doctrine, but only bickers over budget. True to form, the hearing after the Oak Ridge break-in was long on words of shock and outrage but lacking in substantive policy discussion.

Almighty is a fascinating read. With clear scientific explanations and a detailed history, a masterful introduction of key players in



CRITICAL CONNECTIONS

GOOD VIBRATIONS is a brilliant roof-raising musical from 2012 about making a difference in the world by being yourself. It’s the kind of film that makes you fall in love with life. And it was the last movie about which Ken Hanke and I wholeheartedly agreed.

Hanke, our local newspaper film critic in Asheville, N.C., recently passed away at the too-young age of 61. His byline identified him as “Cranky Hanke,” but he had a generous heart. He knew that good film criticism requires knowing three things, at least: something about cinema, something about how to write well, and something about life. The first of these comes naturally to people who watch enough good movies. The second is part gift to be channeled, part skill to be nurtured. As for the third, well, we all know something about life—the trick is whether or not we’re willing to let what we know of *ourselves* be known in our work.

Ken Hanke was a critic who believed his own opinions, but didn’t impose them on others. He understood film criticism as a conversation between movie and audience, in which being right isn’t as important as being authentic.

This kind of critical engagement is often ignored in favor of mere *criticizing*—reacting, not responding, snap judgments instead of considered reflection. “That’s one of the worst things I’ve ever seen” limits the possibility of

conversation to discover more of what the movie might be inviting us to. I want to know *why* you think it’s the worst (or best). I want to be invited into a conversation about authenticity and what it is to live better in the light of what artists and other provocateurs are trying to tell us.

Hanke wrote for a local community—he was rooted in a place and was in dialogue with the people of that place. He knew who his words were for. What he knew about life, art, and words he shared with a community that, in some small way, he helped form. His words pulled us into a citywide conversation about beauty and life, helping to lead us into knowing something more about ourselves.

Good Vibrations climaxes with its hero, the Belfast punk social activist Terri Hooley, leading a ragbag community in transforming Sonny Bono’s “Laugh at Me” into an anthem for making resistance to oppression into a work of joyous and dramatic art. “This world’s got a lot of space / And if they don’t like my face / It ain’t me that’s going anywhere,” they sing. Thanks, Ken, for being a resilient voice who wanted to experience and share the joy of being cranky for the right reasons. ■

Gareth Higgins is an Irish writer and founder of moviesandmeaning.com and irelandretreats.com.

both the nuclear arms race and a newly vibrant resistance, and an exciting retelling of the audacious actions of the resisters who reached the center of the Oak Ridge uranium plant, Zak's work shows us weapons that not only make us less safe but claim victims even when not deployed, weapons that keep us in a peril so unthinkable that most people can't talk about them in any meaningful way.

The government crafts words that hide this horror. What is this "national security site" nicknamed Y-12, these words and letters that don't stand for anything? It's a factory that makes thermonuclear cores



Almighty reads like a novel, worthy of the best contemporary fiction.

for the most destructive weapons ever devised. At the Transform Now Plowshares trial, defense attorneys forced the for-profit managers who run Y-12 to use true words to describe their work instead of their usual euphemisms.

After the Transform Now Plowshares action, aging fences and nonfunctioning alarm systems at the Oak Ridge plant were repaired; management was reshuffled. Kirk Garland, the prudent guard who didn't use deadly force, was fired. New training programs for guards were devised, but many aging buildings have not been replaced, thus subjecting the plant employees and their families in the surrounding area to ever-increasing danger.

At trial, Boertje-Obed pointed out that the Plowshares action had actually improved the lax security at the plant by exposing it. In response, Steven Erhart, manager for the plant from the National Nuclear Security Administration called the security upgrades a "normalization of the deviation from the optimum." Huh?

Both prosecutor and judge spoke often of the activists' disregard of the law. In his closing statement, Boertje-Obed reminded the court that in order to get the New START treaty signed by Congress, President

Obama had to disregard the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and agree to fund and build three nuclear weapons factories—one of them in Oak Ridge. "These new factories will continue building weapons for 70, 80 more years, and that is a clear violation of the law," concluded Boertje-Obed.

Nevertheless, the resisters were found guilty of vandalism and sabotage. The next day Judge Amul Thapar sent them to jail until sentencing because they had committed a "federal crime of terrorism." In contrast, Ellen Barfield, a spokesperson for the nonviolent trio, said: "The real crime? Nuclear weapons." Did she speak the true words, or did Judge Thapar? (An appeals court overturned the sabotage sentence in May 2015, and the three were released.)

Idols and destruction

"Almighty" is another word for God. Dan Zak's book shows us how the United States has made gods of metal out of nuclear weapons, worshipping these multitudinous gods by pouring untold trillions into building, maintaining, and now modernizing bombs that are supposed to keep us safe but are actually making enemies, contaminating the earth forever, sapping our moral strength, and strangling our country by robbing it of necessary resources.

Reading Zak's book gives me a new respect for the truth-telling of nuclear activists, including the watchdog group called Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance, the Global Zero campaign, and ICAN, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. At the latest Review Conference of the Parties of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons at the U.N., the U.S. and U.K. blocked consensus, but the non-nuclear states got 107 countries to sign a resolution calling for the complete abolition of nuclear weapons.

For years, I've studied and participated in anti-nuclear protests. As an oral historian, I've collected and published interviews with Catholic Workers and other resisters, with long segments on the Plowshares movement in my latest books. So I knew the resisters and the spiritual and political rationale that grounds their resistance. But I was woefully ignorant of the fearsome technology

behind the war-making they resist. *Almighty* shocked me, as it may you.

By comparing the facts on the ground—the physical, psychological, and political horrors the bomb has wreaked since its conception—to the words U.S. authorities use to describe it—the cover-ups, the denials of compensation for injury, the bureaucracy that has grown like a cancer over the nuclear industry and even on those in the government supposedly dedicated to containing it—Zak's gripping book should bring nuclear weapons to the front of our national conscience. ■

Rosalie G. Riegler is on the national committee of the War Resisters League and is involved with the Catholic Worker movement. Her latest oral histories are Crossing the Line: Nonviolent Resisters Speak Out for Peace and Doing Time for Peace: Resistance, Family, and Community.

Reviewed by Julie Polter

BETTER TOGETHER

The Third Reconstruction: Moral Mondays, Fusion Politics, and the Rise of a New Justice Movement, by William J. Barber II with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. Beacon Press.

DURING A FRACTIOUS election year marked by "how low can you go?" rhetoric, a hopeful word about democracy can be hard to find. When our civil society and citizenry seem evermore splintered by issues of race, immigration, wealth inequality, women's health, guns, and ideology, who would dare speak with sincerity about finding common cause and increasing enfranchisement?

Rev. William Barber II, for one. In *The Third Reconstruction: Moral Mondays, Fusion Politics, and the Rise of a New Justice Movement*, he argues that "fusion coalitions rooted in moral dissent have power to transform our world from the grassroots community up." He believes that people committed to different causes, of different races and faiths and no faith, can come together to advance broader justice and perhaps even revive a democracy that has seen better days.

He believes this because he's seen it: He helped forge the 2013 "Moral Mondays"



Rev. William Barber leads a Moral Mondays rally at the North Carolina state Capitol.

protests in North Carolina that brought more than 100,000 people to rallies across the state protesting voting restrictions and corporate-funded extremist legislation, and had sister rallies in several other states. But this wasn't a spontaneous eruption—the broad-based coalition behind Moral Mondays first formed in 2007 to advocate for expanding voting rights.

In this book Barber, a Disciples of Christ pastor and president of the North Carolina chapter of the NAACP, uses autobiography and U.S. history to root the story—the successes, failures, and wisdom gained—of the work that led to the Moral Mondays campaign and beyond.

As a young pastor, Barber learned valuable lessons when he participated in a failed effort to unionize a textile factory in Martinsville, Va. In the aftermath, he meditated on Psalm 94 (“Who rises up for me against the wicked? Who stands up for me against evildoers?”) and found there the spiritual mandate for sustained moral dissent, even when political victory is out of sight. But he also took an honest look at his strategic failings; a key one was not bringing white pastors and workers into the effort, allowing the white factory owners to divide and conquer the workers along racial lines. His wariness from his own negative experiences with white people had tripped him up. He writes:

Martinsville showed me that Jesus's insistence that we love our enemies is more than an ethical ideal. In the struggle for human freedom, it is also a practical necessity. If love does not drive out the fears that so easily divide us, we will never gather together in coalitions strong enough to challenge those who benefit from injustice.

Barber has relied on this combination of moral framing and strategic organizing ever since.

While in politics we often focus on the big national elections, Barber describes how our future is being shaped at the state level, not just in elections but in the legislative work that happens in between. Through the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), wealthy individuals and corporations have been funding “model legislation” to remake America from its statehouses up—slashing public education funding, enacting laws to restrict voting, undercutting environmental protections, and pushing efforts such as the North Carolina “bathroom laws,” along with a host of other measures. Divide, defund, defeat.

In the face of such destructive and well-resourced efforts to divide and conquer, Barber uses the story of coalition building in North Carolina to demonstrate how we can unite and resist. Principles include: Use moral language to discuss public policy, include religious leaders of all faiths, diversify the movement in all ways possible—help those suffering from injustice to not see one another as enemies, acknowledge the centrality of race and the goal of racial equity, recruit scholars who will do the analysis necessary to create strong and effective policies, and focus on voter registration and education—power comes from a diverse electorate that recognizes common interests.

The Third Reconstruction is both inspiring and pragmatic. It encourages readers to claim moral dissent to injustice as a calling—and to marry that calling to practical, local organizing, strategic thinking, and committed bridge-building. It will be a lot of work, but Barber's confidence in the potential of this kind of movement-building is convincing. His vision of what democracy could look like is a healing tonic to toxic election-year cynicism. ■

Julie Polter is a senior associate editor of *Sojourners*.

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EXCERPT SANCTUARY

I WENT TO CHURCH with my classmate. I sat in the common room with stacks of books around me. I needed to get some work done. Nothing was getting done at home. I didn't really want to go home anyway. Still hadn't made the bed. The sun was setting, the books were all around me, and I stared ahead not paying attention to anything. My classmate asked if I wanted to go to church with him. Yes, on a Saturday evening.

The church had no pulpit. There was no raised area designated for ministers and the choir. Everyone sat on the same level. The ministers in chairs on the left; the piano on the right. In the middle was a platform of plants with a bay window behind it, opening out onto a park while the sky slowly darkened during worship. It was like nature burst into the middle of the church. God's created world was center stage. Human beings were peripheral.

I didn't remember the service, and there was no wooden altar rail like in an AME church, but I was at church so I knew I could talk to God about it. As the service ended, I asked my classmate, a staff minister at the church, if I could kneel at the front and pray.

"Of course."

I knelt, but I didn't pray. I cried. I cried and I cried and I cried. I didn't hear the pianist leave. I didn't hear the other parishioners close the door. I didn't even hear the pastor tell my friend to keep the church open for me. The world around me disappeared while I lay crumpled up in front of the altar. By the time I looked up and wiped my face, an hour had passed. My minister classmate patiently sat in a chair in the hallway.

"You okay?"

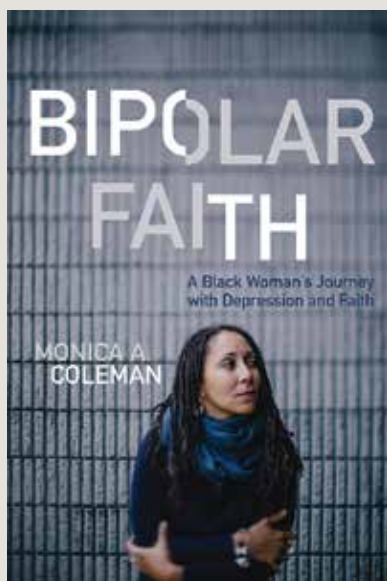
Of course I wasn't. "Better." I said.

"I'll take you to your car. Come by and have dinner with us tonight, okay?"

"I'll be okay." I lied. "Really."

I liked this church. They waited while I cried to God. They changed their schedule, took their time, and waited while I cried. And still treated me like a human being when I was done. These were good people. This was a good church. ■

From Bipolar Faith: A Black Woman's Journey with Depression and Faith, by Monica A. Coleman (copyright 2016). Used by permission of Fortress Press, fortresspress.com.



Reviewed by Beau Underwood

A COMPLEX VOCATION

Varieties of Gifts: Multiplicity and the Well-Lived Pastoral Life, by Cynthia G. Lindner. Rowman & Littlefield.

THE ROLE AND identity of the minister has always been complex: Preacher and teacher, pastor and prophet, counselor and social worker. Despite this inherent dynamism, church structures—seminaries, congregations, denominations—often focus on transforming diverse candidates for ministry into a uniform class of spiritual professionals equipped to serve Christ in a bygone era. Responding to the challenges facing congregations today involves hearing and sharing the gospel in fresh ways, which requires a revolution in how ministers understand themselves and the training they receive.

Cynthia G. Lindner's *Varieties of Gifts* does not read like a revolutionary text, but it is iconoclastic. While Lindner does not argue directly with the many books on pastoral leadership encouraging conformity to a specific mold, she gently brushes them away with a thoroughly postmodern conception of the "well-lived pastoral life." Drawing on insights from dialogical psychology, which highlights the "multiplicity" of the human self, Lindner brings attention to the diverse talents and perspectives of aspiring and seasoned pastors. Too often this plurality is perceived as vocational ambivalence or personal confusion—an obstacle to be overcome in the modern quest to create a unified, coherent sense of self. Yet this pursuit of a single identity deprives ministers of important resources, limiting both their professional effectiveness and satisfaction.

Varieties of Gifts seeks to end this repression and embrace the minister's natural multiplicity. Lindner believes this path leads to the realization of untapped potential at a moment when religious institutions are desperate to discover new and different ways of being faithful. She writes, "effective ministers have always inhabited plural roles and multiple selves which have funded the flexibility

and inventiveness that religious leadership demands over the long haul.” Thus, the internal tensions of the minister’s life (How do I serve this community as both prophet and priest? How do I remain authentic while embodying a role defined by perception?) become a resource in the pursuit of excellence rather than a distraction that promises to lead one astray.

While the book’s argument has a psychological frame, its foundation rests on Lindner’s interviews with new and established ministers. She quotes one as saying:

I am a chaplain in a jail. I read the scriptures and buy academic volumes online and go to seminary classes. ... I spend much of my time with gang members on the streets. I am a pastor. I am a community organizer and legal advocate. But I also am a songwriter. ... I try to integrate my music into my local web of relationships. ... But after all this, I just want to write essays and fly fish. So I take gangsters fishing and write about that.

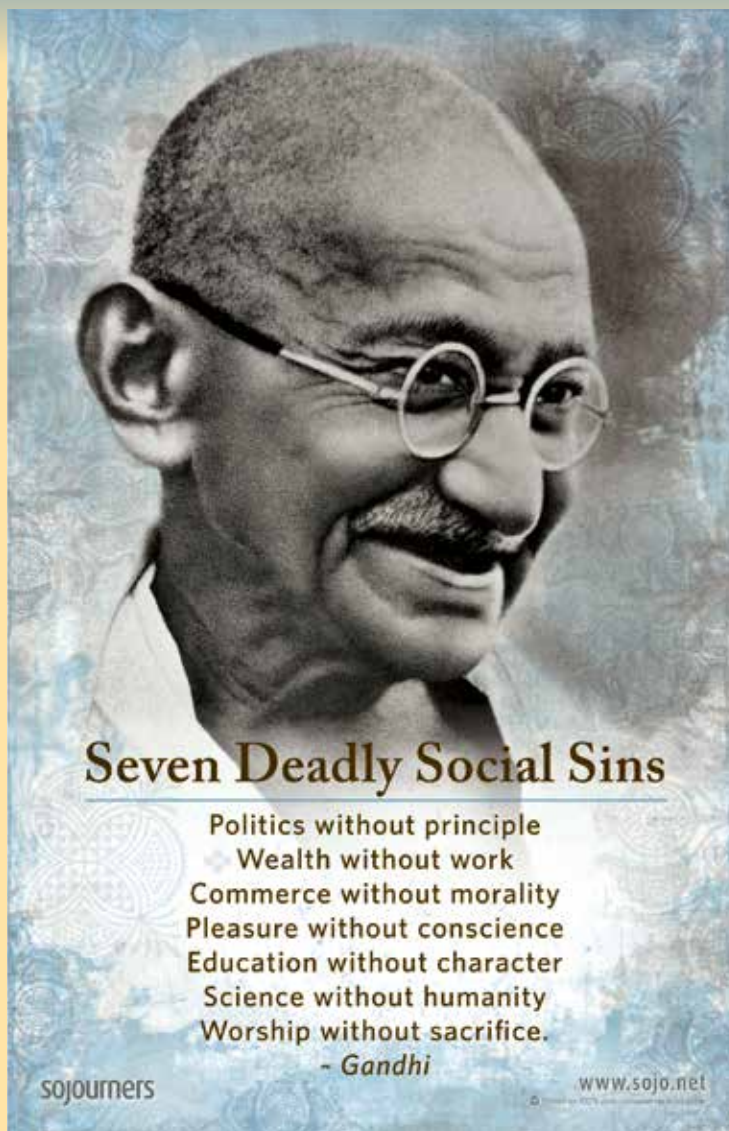
This is just one example of the challenges multiplicity creates—and the opportunities. In previous times, this minister would have been counseled to demonstrate “seriousness” by focusing on a narrower career path, jettisoning the “distractions.” Instead, he has embraced diverse interests, both his identity and conception of ministry.

During my own career in ministry, I have struggled to reconcile the desire to march in the streets with the need to pray in the sanctuary. I have navigated the tension of fostering consensus within a community despite holding deep convictions about what is right and just. After years of claiming that my call was never to a church, I now pastor a congregation. In other words, *Varieties of Gifts* describes the reality I wrestle with and names the multiplicity that has made me a more effective and faithful leader.

Lindner offers a compelling argument for nurturing, rather than stifling, this multiple-mindedness and an understanding of the benefits it brings to leaders, the church, and God’s people. ■

Beau Underwood, former senior director of advocacy at *Sojourners*, is a Disciples of Christ minister in Jefferson City, Mo.

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CultureWatch

BOOKS ART MUSIC FILM

Reviewed by Olivia Whitener

TO KNOW AND BE KNOWN

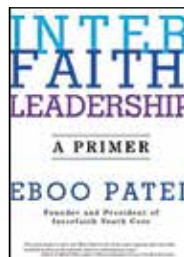
Interfaith Leadership: A Primer, by Eboo Patel. Beacon Press.

"WE CAN'T PUT cheese on all of the hamburgers for dinner, and can you please say 'Dear God' not 'Dear Jesus' when you pray?" These were instructions I gave to my dad before a birthday party in elementary school, worried that my new Jewish friends would not feel comfortable in our Christian home. Because I grew up in a religiously diverse area, I was cognizant of differences in religious practice before I knew the beliefs behind my own Christian rituals.

This is how my journey of interfaith learning and leadership began: by inviting my friends from school over to play and making sure they had something to eat. In his book *Interfaith Leadership*, Eboo Patel defines interfaith experiences as those "where people with diverse faiths interact, and their faith identities are somehow involved." We weren't just religiously diverse students sitting next to each other at school sharing our crayons—we were in each other's homes, and that meant our faith identities were exposed and explored.

Interfaith Leadership outlines three questions that come up in interactions with people different from you: Who am I? Who are you? How do we relate to each other? Through stories of his experiences and those of friends from different faiths, Patel, founder of Interfaith Youth Core and a *Sojourners* columnist, shows us the process of becoming an interfaith leader who builds bridges and strengthens communities. He explains theories behind interfaith work in a way that is easy to understand, applying them directly to daily interactions and conflicts. For a short primer, *Interfaith Leadership* could be the most helpful tool for anyone striving to develop "positive, constructive, warm, caring, cooperative engagement" (aka "relationship") with others.

Patel also makes the case for why, in our increasingly pluralistic society, interfaith relationships are crucial to a thriving democracy. He warns against stopping at



just "respect" and accommodation in a religiously diverse community—arguing that this only leads to increased tribalism. He writes, "If the chief virtue in our diverse society is respect for identity, we are in danger of becoming a nation where people accommodate those with whom they disagree but have

little else to do with them." The U.S. political system relies on participation by all of its citizens, and "diversity, when left alone, tends toward isolation."

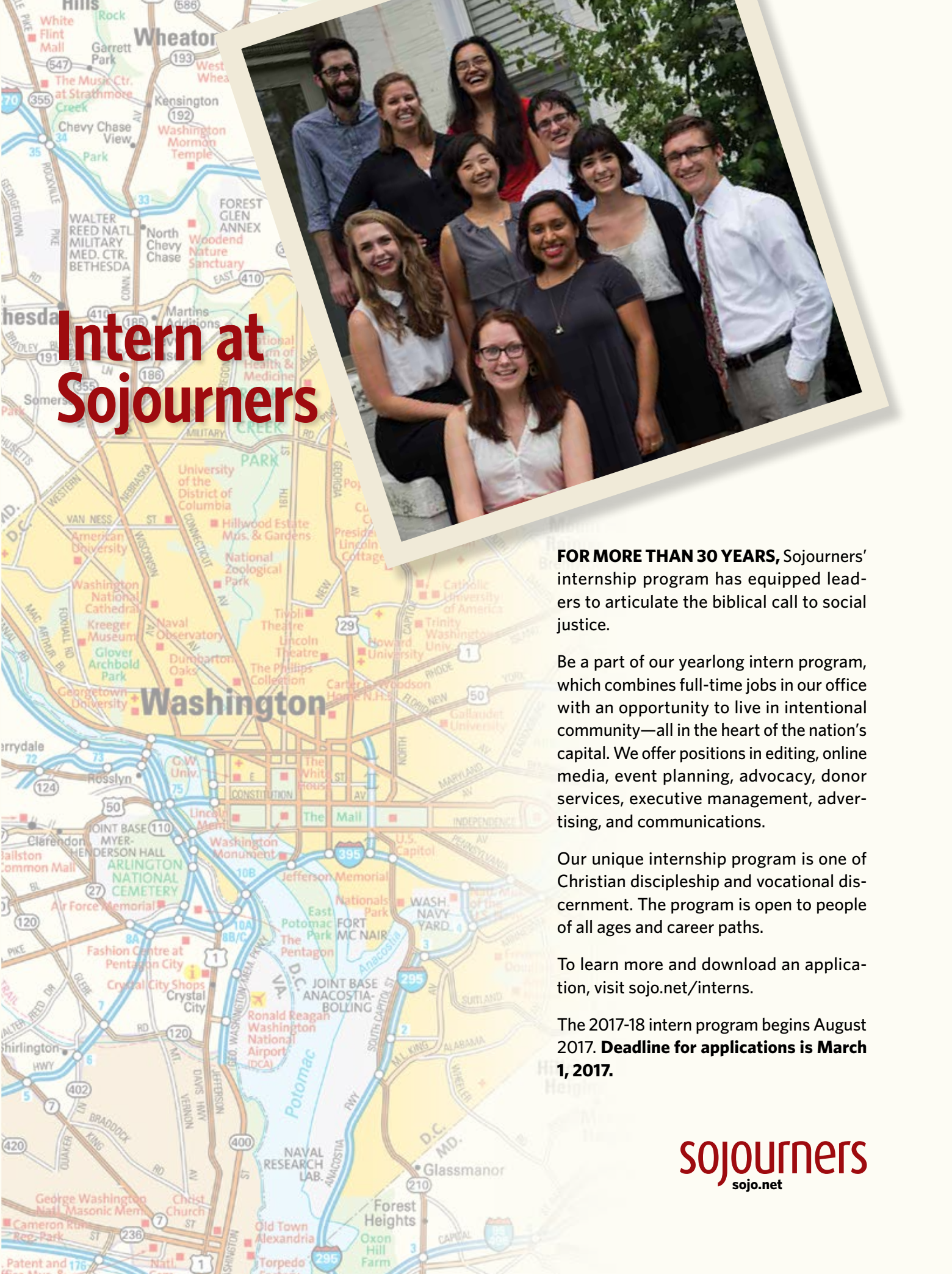
Community-based interfaith leaders can lead neighbors in building bridges of friendship and trust by encouraging dialogue about values each holds strongly. Conversely, the more that neighbors grow in relationship by doing things together, the more naturally conversations about different faith and life experiences emerge.

"Diversity, when left alone, tends toward isolation."

Justice leaders often get asked, "Why bother working for something that most likely will never be achieved?" Patel provides an eloquent response to those who doubt the feasibility of reaching an engaged and positive pluralism: "The landscape becomes far more beautiful along the way." Local benefits of civic engagement through an interfaith lens can make the struggle for changes in hearts at the national level a bit easier. A relatable, resourceful leader with the grit to keep going after getting knocked back can see prejudice reduced, social problems addressed, and binding narratives written through interfaith relationship-building.

"The time for interfaith leaders has come," concludes Patel. Whether he is referencing the high rate of interfaith conflicts around the globe or the hateful rhetoric regarding diversity that has exploded on the U.S. political scene, I could not agree more. An interfaith leader would be remiss to not have *Interfaith Leadership* in her back pocket for the journey. ■

Olivia Whitener is a *Sojourners* editorial assistant.



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No Ordinary Life

ORDINARY TIME CONTINUES, in this season after Pentecost. The designation “ordinary” always strikes me as odd. This season is anything but ordinary in the common way in which we use the term. Ordinary typically means that something has no special or unique characteristics. Ordinary is simple, average, unexciting.

In one sense, the lectionary passages can be described as ordinary. There are no mighty battles or astonishing miracles or dreamy visits from God. The text is full of practical teaching, of how to live out the life of faith. Ordinary, right? And yet, the life to which the Spirit calls us is anything but ordinary.

A couple of warnings are in order. If you’re looking for material for “Seven Steps to (fill in the blank)”-style preaching and teaching, then don’t look here. These passages are not going to give you warm fuzzies about your personal relationship with Jesus. There’s nothing watered down or simple about God’s teaching and commands in these passages. We are called to nothing less than radical discipleship: Take up crosses, extend and receive God’s mercy, prioritize the poor for our salvation, and establish communities of trust. If you discover anything truly ordinary as you study and reflect,

it is yourself. You cannot live this life *ordinarily*. We are in the stretch between Pentecost and Advent. You’ll need to connect to the power and patience of these traditions in order to live out the extraordinary call God has placed before such ordinary people.



Brandon Wrencher is pastor of Blackburn’s Chapel United Methodist Church and executive director of Blackburn Community Outreach in Todd, N.C.

[SEPTEMBER 4]

Making Choices

Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 1; Philemon 1:1-21; Luke 14:25-33

FOLLOWING JESUS is a costly business, as Luke reminds us, requiring sacrifice and shedding of our slave mind in order to move in freedom. But is that what we find in much of U.S. Christianity? In studying the spiritual lives of U.S. teenagers, sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton determined that teens’ reigning religious worldview can be described as “moralistic therapeutic deism.” Moralistic: God wants people to behave. Therapeutic: God wants everyone to be happy. Deism: God exists and started the world turning, but is now remote, without personal engagement.

Those from the underside of U.S. life, the disinherited, recognize this worldview for what it truly is: the leftovers from a Christianity that is more American than it is Christian. Frederick Douglass described it as “the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial, and hypocritical Christianity of this land.”

However, moralistic therapeutic deism isn’t confined to teenagers; it’s also a

dominant religious expression across ages in contemporary American life, especially among whites. Here’s the problem though: When people don’t “behave,” are they seen as acting against God? How do people with their backs against the wall maintain happiness? Are we alone in resolving the pervasive evil and brokenness of the world? This false faith can’t cope with the guilt and responsibility that morally is required because of human sin and evil.

Blessings and curses are set before us. Choosing the blessed life means taking up a cross. Any other way presumes that humans can save themselves and our creation. Taking this route is what got us in the mess we’re in. We need a God that fixes our mess while empowering us with a second chance to participate in the recovery plan. Choose the costly grace. Choose life with God. As anti-Nazi Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us: “Grace is *costly* because it calls us to follow, and it is *grace* because it calls us to follow *Jesus Christ*.”

[SEPTEMBER 11]

Who Is a Slave?

Exodus 32:7-14; Psalm 51:1-10;
1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10

IN EXODUS, we hear the ancient story. The Hebrews have suffered for years under Egyptian oppression. God declares their liberation. Even as Moses marches them to freedom, their minds remain in bondage. They want to worship and live like their former oppressors. In Luke, we hear about the Pharisees, who stand in the tradition of Moses; a tradition of seeking freedom from bondage. Yet they condemn Jesus for welcoming and eating with “sinners” (15:2). The Pharisees want to deny exodus to those whom Jesus seeks to offer it. The Pharisees uncover their own captivity to the status quo. Internalized oppression is the threat in both stories.

The quote attributed to Harriet Tubman is relevant here: “I could’ve freed ... more if only they knew they were slaves.” Where one is righteous, many continue to stumble. Where many are righteous, there are only a few who have lost their way. Who can bear with a people who so easily fall into such traps? Justice alone doesn’t guarantee holiness of heart. Self-righteousness lies ready to re-enforce the bondage from which the oppressed are set free. Brazilian Paulo Freire wrote that “Liberation is ... a childbirth, and a painful one.” Through liberation we are born again.

What about going from childbirth to maturity? Liberation doesn’t remove the guilt and shame of bondage. Another force is needed to move the liberated to wholeness. On display in these passages is the God of deliverance and patience, the One who sets free and forgives. God extends not only liberation, but mercy. Liberation *and* mercy are needed. Mercy is not getting what is deserved. Liberation frees us. Mercy cleanses us. “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my

“Living the Word” reflections for October can be found at sojo.net/magazine. “Preaching the Word,” Sojourners’ online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Psalm 51:1-2).

[SEPTEMBER 18]

Cheating the System

Amos 8:4-7; Psalm 113; 1 Timothy 2:1-7;
Luke 16:1-13

THIS WEEK'S theological highlight is the preferential option for the poor. The parable of the dishonest manager in Luke sheds light on this theme better than any. Without the master's knowledge, the manager reduces the debts of the master's customers in order to make friends with them so they will open their homes to him once he is fired from his job. Given the economic caste system of the day, the manager's actions are discerning and calculative. After being alerted to his shaky employment status, the manager prepared for what was to come. He cheats the economic system of his workplace in order to secure a stable life for himself following termination.

Though Jesus acknowledges the manager's misconduct, he also commends the manager's shrewdness. Jesus exposes that living in the present in light of the future is bound up with how we use our money and resources. The manager's motives for reducing debt are selfish. He helps these customers expecting something in return. But Jesus demands that we not look for reciprocity; that we give to the poor, especially those who cannot give money in return. Like the manager, Jesus calls us to interrupt the world's economic system, to resist its vision of how things ought to be—the poor staying poor and the rich staying rich. This is cheating the world's system for the sake of the kingdom's system; of living now in this age, as citizens of the kingdom of heaven!

The social distinctions of rich and poor—and the means by which these are established and reinforced—cease to exist in God's community. The kingdom ethic of relationships is grounded in love and selflessness. And in equality. Giving is not one-way in this story. The poor may not reciprocate with money, but they don't just receive. Jesus says that the poor welcome us into eternal homes. They welcome us all into a space where we can put down our clamor for prestige, our striving for power, our addiction to labels, and our

weapons of division. The poor welcome us all into the space of God's home, of true identity, where all that matters is that we are all children of God.

[SEPTEMBER 25]

Identity Politics

Amos 6:1a, 4-7; Psalm 146; 1 Timothy 6:6-19;
Luke 16:19-31

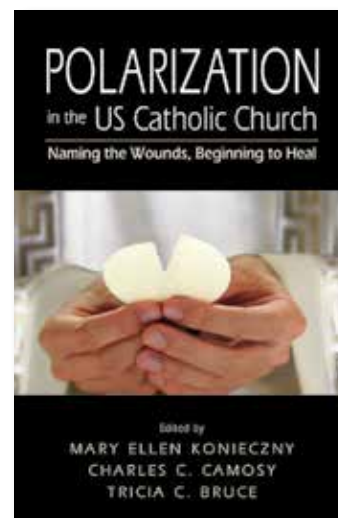
THE POLITICS OF identity is a core feature in these passages. The rich ("who lie on beds of ivory" or dress in "fine linen") always make an easy target as *the* enemy. Scripture is clear that inherent to financial wealth are the traps of greed and pride. But wealth does not only consist of money. There also is cultural wealth, which so often escapes our contemporary judgment. Not so with the prophets. Amos launches a strong critique of self-indulgence within the Israelite community. The longstanding leadership within the culture is suspect if it doesn't care for those on the margins. Even a community under tyranny can neglect its own. The distinction between oppressor and oppressed collapses in the human heart.

The gospel writer gets even more specific. A rich man abandons care for a beggar—both children of Israel. Cultural and ethnic affinity cannot overcome the chasm the rich man has set between himself and Lazarus. None of our possessions, whether money or culture, are ours for the taking.

We didn't bring anything into this world. All we have is a gift from God and thus to be shared. Not stolen. Not protected. Shared. This takes a community of trust that escapes our age-old captivity to identity politics. Multiculturalism and nationalism are mirages. They operate by control rather than trust.

Our identity in the divine, in eternity, is more basic than our religious, racial, gender, class, and any other identities. When bell hooks talks about identity politics, she quotes James Baldwin: "It's not a question of whether you're gay or straight or black or white: What do you *stand* for? Who *are* you? How can you know *that*—and operate from *that* position of power?" We belong to one another by our shared created-ness and capacity for goodness. We are a Beloved Community. ■

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The Big Move

AFTER NEARLY 50 years moving from place to place—usually under cover of darkness to stay ahead of colleges claiming we still owed library fines—the Sojourners staff is finally moving to a place of our own.

We've been leasing space up to now, paying increasingly higher rents as the nation's capital has become a hip and happening city. (Which began soon after we arrived in 1975. Coincidence? Not bragging, but vintage clothing stores didn't become popular in D.C. until we showed up wearing clothing that, unbeknown to us, fit that category.)

Over time, the poor neighborhood that God called us to was overtaken by Starbucks and Target, and our office expenses went up accordingly. To be fair, maybe God wanted chain stores to provide low-cost merchandise to our underserved inner city. But what kind of god would also bring in a Bed, Bath, & Beyond?! In all our years work-



under the thumb of landlords, we will finally be under our own thumbs, all 86 of them, if you count the interns. Our seventh and final move will be to a building we purchased. "We" meaning Sojourners, a Mennonite bank, and hundreds of supportive friends who share our commitment to justice, reconciliation, and having to empty our own trash.

Investing in a building is a better use of resources than renting, and the timing was perfect, since we needed to change the toilet paper in our old building. The men's room has an oddly designed dispenser with no visible means of disconnection, no clear way to achieve what should be one of modern society's simplest actions. (Isn't there enough sadness in the world without placing complicated mechanical devices in the final sanctuary for a busy person? *Must everything be an IQ test?!*)

In our new building—our *own* building—we will not be faced with such daunting challenges. At my insistence there will be an open, 24-pack of Charmin leaning against the wall, preferably in the lobby, so visitors can quickly see that Sojourners has the practical good sense to buy in bulk, like the early settlers who would stop at Costco before their treacherous journey west.

OUR NEW building is on Capitol

Hill, placing us right in the belly of the beast of American influence and power, although when you look at a street map, it's probably closer to the lower intestine of the beast, or maybe the bladder.

Like the biblical prophets before us, we will be close to power, but not of it; we will rail against the sins of politics, but not be lured in by them; we will be a vocal and determined voice outside the walls of the political elite. Fortunately, those walls are also close to a nice bagel place, so after wielding the righteous voice of God we can get coffee and a cinnamon-raisin.

We'll be a much-needed voice of accountability, but also a resource for those in power. For example, our experience in nonviolent resistance could have been helpful to the Democrats who recently staged a sit-in on the House floor. Sojourners has been doing sit-ins for years, and we could have shared how we keep sharp when our strength is sapped by extended periods of protest. Two words: Cheese Combos. Portable, nutritious, and easy to get through security (unless the metal detectors are set on "*delicious!*"). Combos make any act of civil disobedience a joy.

Plus, you can get them cheap at Target. In our old neighborhood. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

Location, location, location.

ing for justice and tenant rights, we didn't once yearn for luxury sheets or French-made kitchen utensils. (Although, when you need Brita filters, they keep them just inside the front door. With Target, you have to go upstairs. I'm just sayin'.) When organic food stores started moving in, it was enough to make us nostalgic for buying milk at the corner liquor store. (You had to check carefully the date on the carton, because milk tended to hang around the store longer than did, say, Colt 45, which seemed to be much more in demand.)

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